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Aspects of Kipling's art

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ASPECTS OF KIPLING'S ART

Aspects of Kipling's Art

by

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PREFACE

IT NEED hardly be said that this book does not pretend to cover all aspects of Kipling's art. It deals with some facets of his work that have seemed to me of particular interest, most of which to my knowledge have not been dealt with at any length before. My starting point was an attempt to interpret a number of his more enigmatic stories. In its turn this led to the chapter in which I have tried to analyse the technique of what is usually called his late manner.

No doubt some readers will find this chapter heavy going, but I believe such a general survey of narrative and stylistic devices may nevertheless be of some use. The technique of the stories in question is of no little interest in itself. It was invented by Kipling and has no precedent in English prose that I know of. Contemporary criticism wholly failed to see what it was meant to convey, and even today it is calculated to baffle the general reader. The fame that Kipling dreamed of gaining from his late work must be posthumous. It is my hope that the present book may contribute to a better understanding of its very remarkable and sometimes startling qualities.

While the meaning, or rather the meanings, of the five stories I have tried to interpret is practically guaranteed to elude any reader who does not make a close study of them, most of the other tales in his late manner are less resistant to interpretation, though they often do contain cryptic elements. They therefore do not call for a point-for-point analysis, but only for an explanation of esoteric

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themes and passages, and this is one of the things I have endeavoured to do in Chapter VI.

The interpretations of the five tales afford a clearer picture of Kipling's technique than it is possible to give in a general analysis. Four of them are therefore printed after the relevant chapter by way of illustration. The analysis of *The Comprehension of Private Copper* has no reference to the preceding chapter. It is printed as an example of something that must have a wider application: the way in which a piece of literature may become incomprehensible with the passing of time because it cannot be understood without a knowledge of some idea or catchword that was familiar at the time of writing, but has since been forgotten.

The dates given for the stories and poems are those of publication, not of composition. Kipling is reported to have kept a list of the dates when they were begun and finished, but this list has not been accessible to me.

The critic who lives with the works of a writer for a long time often gets to know the tracks along which the latter's thoughts move, to the point where he can say with some confidence: this is what X is likely to mean, or conversely: this is not the sort of thing one would expect from X. This is useful for the critic, and often gives him an advantage over the casual reader. But it has drawbacks too: for one thing he may be completely assured of something that he cannot demonstrate, and that his readers therefore refuse to accept, even if he is right. And for another, he may actually be led astray by his knowledge of the way the author's mind usually works, because the latter may have wanted to do something unusual in the passage in question.

I have tried to keep this piece of copybook-heading

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wisdom in mind. Yet I am well aware that some of the devices by which I believe Kipling suggests esoteric meanings may strike some readers as so odd as to arouse their scepticism. This is another reason for the chapter about his technique: it is meant to supplement the analyses and to support the latter by showing that these devices are not confined to one particular story, but are something that Kipling made a habit of, and that is to be found in other tales as well.

The book was written concurrently with another and more comprehensive one, to be published in Danish, but as yet unfinished.

Of the five interpretations those of *Mrs Bathurst* and *The Prophet and the Country* have been published, in a somewhat shorter version, in the January 1962 number of the Danish periodical *Orbis Litterarum*, while *The Comprehension of Private Copper* has appeared in *English Studies*, November 1961. My thanks are due to the editors of these journals for allowing me to reprint them.

I wish to make acknowledgment to Mrs George Bambridge and to Macmillan and Co., London, for permission to quote from Kipling's work in my book, and also to Methuen and Co., London, for permission to quote the verses from *The Last Rhyme of True Thomas*.

I have read and profited from the work of Charles Carrington, Bonamy Dobrée, Robert Escarpit, Hilton Brown, Francis Léaud, C. S. Lewis, Edward Shanks, and Edmund Wilson, though more for the general background than for the specific aspects of Kipling dealt with in the present book. These have hitherto on the whole received little attention except for Dr J. M. S. Tompkins' brilliant study, *The Art of Rudyard Kipling*. To the latter

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book I am indebted, both as an incentive and for a number of specific points. I also want to thank Dr Tompkins for giving me many opportunities to discuss with her the interpretations of *Mrs Bathurst*, *The Prophet and the Country*, *The Bull That Thought* and 'Teem'. And finally I must thank my wife for much acute criticism and a good many ideas.

C. A. B.

Copenhagen,
1963.

CHAPTER I

THE REVELATION OF MIRTH

THE TITLE Kipling gave to one of his volumes of short stories, *The Day's Work*, no doubt epitomized for contemporary readers his attitude to life. But even this title, with its apparent insistence on the practical side of existence, we now know had implications of quite another kind for himself: it was inspired by a motto that his father inscribed on the chimney-piece of his house in Vermont: the Night cometh when No Man can Work.¹

For the truth is that Kipling lived in two worlds. Behind the one where the day's work is done, with its machines and ships and soldiers and administrators, there lies another whose gates sometimes open for him. This is the night side of reality, and his principal symbol for it is *the night*. In *Something of Myself* (pp. 18-19) he describes the first time he crossed its boundaries. This was when he was staying with his mother in a London boarding-house; he was a small boy then, apparently eleven or twelve years old. I give the whole passage in order that the reader may judge for himself whether any details are as irrelevant as they may appear at first sight: is it fortuitous, for example, that the toad is named after the King of the Nether World?

Here, for the first time, it happened that the night got into my head. I rose up and wandered about that still house till day-break, when I slipped out into the little brick-walled garden

¹ Carrington: *Rudyard Kipling*, p. 207.

and saw the dawn break. All would have been well but for Pluto, a pet toad brought back from Epping Forest, who lived mostly in one of my pockets. It struck me that he might be thirsty, and I stole into my Mother's room and would have given him a drink from a water-jug. But it slipped and broke and very much was said. The ex-butler could not understand why I had stayed awake all night. I did not know then that such night-wakings would be laid upon me through my life; or that my fortunate hour would be on the turn of sunrise, with a sou'-west breeze afoot.

He returns to the subject again in the chapter about his seven years in India: 'Often the night got into my head¹ as it had done in the boarding-house in the Brompton Road, and I would wander till dawn in all manner of odd places. . . .' (p. 53).

Obviously these are experiences to which Kipling attached great weight, and what he tells us about them has the authority of an autobiography, but it is typical of his reticence that he does not tell us in what they consist. Indeed, the reason may well be that they are incommunicable, because they are private to himself and afford no common ground for the writer and the reader; and also because they belong to a hinterland of consciousness that language has no means of dealing with in direct terms.

These passages might mean nothing more extraordinary than that he sometimes could not sleep, and then sought relief in night-walking, were it not for the peculiar language in which he describes his experiences: the odd phrase that 'the night got into my head' and the cryptic

¹ It is perhaps significant that this phrase also occurs in *Cold Iron*, which is an allegory on the role of the poet in the world.

passage about his 'fortunate hour'. As it is, he clearly refers to something very strange and of great importance to himself.¹

It is possible that *The Brushwood Boy* reflects his own feeling of having a double life, divided between a daylight and a nocturnal world, with this difference that the young officer in the story only finds his way to the secret country in dreams, while Kipling entered it awake. One notes that he placed this story at the end of *The Day's Work*. This is an indication that he attached particular importance to it: it is his parting word to the reader, and it sometimes has the effect of emphasizing the dominant note of the book. That he should have ended a volume called *The Day's Work* with a story about a life half of which is spent in a dream world is surely a very curious thing.

It looks as if it were meant to convey something to the watchful reader, or at least express something of importance to himself. Is it too far-fetched, one wonders, to see in this a veiled hint that the daylight world is not the only one, and that there is another kind of reality that may even invade the scene where the day's work is done? Kipling certainly thought so himself, and a great many of his stories, from *The Phantom 'Rickshaw* and *At the End of the Passage* to *In the Same Boat* and *Fairy-Kist* have as their theme such an invasion.

The dreams in *The Brushwood Boy* are poetical, but also

¹ A comparison with Dickens suggests itself here. It is quite clear that Dickens's night walks served the deliberate purpose of exploring realms of consciousness, chiefly of sinister and frightening qualities in familiar scenes, that only revealed themselves to him in the dark. (Cf. e.g. *Night Walks* in *The Uncommercial Traveller*.) There is of course no question of influence: Kipling does not appear to have been interested in Dickens.

frightening. They read as if they had at least a foundation in actual experience and, as Dr Tompkins has pointed out, this is confirmed by a passage in *Brazilian Sketches*, where he mentions a dream of his own that is very like one of Cottar's in the story.

But while Cottar's adventures beyond the boundaries of tangible reality, in spite of the atmosphere of menace and fear that surrounds them, are worth seeking after, and afford an excitement absent from his workday existence, the dreams that occur elsewhere in Kipling's stories are wholly evil. This applies also to the only one ascribed to his own persona. It is recorded in *The House Surgeon*, in a passage whose cryptic wording somehow succeeds in suggesting a horror beyond the power of ordinary words to express:

I fell into the most terrible of all dreams—that joyous one in which all past evil has not only been wiped out of our lives, but has never been committed; and in the very bliss of assured innocence, before our loves shriek and change countenance, we wake to the day we have earned.

The dreams suggest sinister powers somewhere at the back of normal life, that threaten to break through to the dreamer and deprive him of his reason or his life. Hummil in *At the End of the Passage* keeps a spur in his bed to prevent himself from falling asleep, because his dreams are more terrible than flesh and blood can stand. In the end he is found dead: the dreams have overtaken him. In *In the Same Boat* both Conroy and Miss Henschil are being driven out of their minds by a recurrent dream of great horror. John Marden in *The Woman in His Life* is a similar case.

But whatever similarity there may be between the

dream themes in the stories and Kipling's nocturnal visitations, when 'night gets into his head', the latter are not frightening at all. On the contrary, as they appear in his stories, they are accompanied by a state of release and exaltation.

While his account of the night getting into his head in *Something of Myself* tells us nothing about the actual experiences involved, he uses what appears to be the same theme in some of his stories, and here he is much more explicit in describing his Fortunate Hour and the events which it heralds. It is true that the occurrences narrated in these tales are unmistakably fictitious, or at least completely disguised versions of things that may really have happened, but Kipling always describes them in a way that seems to indicate that their emotional colouring corresponds to something he has experienced himself. In some of the stories he gives almost identical accounts of the omens that announce his 'fortunate hour'.

There is a curious parallelism between Kipling's accounts of his Fortunate Hour and the moments of abysmal horror experienced by characters in some of the stories, as if the two were the same phenomenon with opposite signs. He describes the coming of his Fortunate Hour as 'a night of nights' or 'one of our nights' ('we' being himself and the 'demon' that conducts him through his adventures). In *In the Same Boat* Conroy and Miss Henschil refer to the time of their ordeal as 'my Night' and, corresponding to the omens that herald the Fortunate Hour, they both receive what they call 'Sentence' and 'Notice'. The unbearable depression described so realistically in *The House Surgeon* is also preceded by a warning of its coming: 'a little grey shadow, as it might have been a snowflake seen against the light, floating at an

immense distance in the background of my brain.'¹

But in the case of his own *Fortunate Hours* he makes it quite clear that what these promise him is something inconceivably marvellous: a veil is drawn apart; reality assumes sharper outlines and brighter colours, and is experienced with an intensity beyond that of everyday life. All this is outside the scope of normal perception, and is therefore, strictly speaking, incommunicable; the writer must be content to get as near to it as the limitations of language, and of the art forms he chooses, permit. In the case of Kipling, the latter are poems and short stories, the poems being reflections on the general nature of the Revelation of Mirth, while the stories present the same subject in concrete terms by means of their action.

One of the many curious things about Kipling's treatment of this theme is that the vehicle he chooses in order to express a transcendental experience, which had for him the nature almost of a divine gift, is a type of story whose action is farcical. Farcical tales are common in Kipling,² they are found in nearly all the volumes of stories from every period of his life, but the great majority of them have no reference to his philosophy of mirth. Some of

¹ The narrator says: 'I never felt anything like it'. But no one could have described a fit of obsessive fear and despondency so convincingly who had not experienced something similar himself. Kipling puts on record in *Something of Myself* (p. 134) that in fact he had, viz. when he took a house at Torquay that caused 'a gathering blackness of mind and sorrow of the heart' in those who came under its roof.

² Francis Léaud in his interesting study *La Poétique de Rudyard Kipling* (p. 163) computes that 110 of Kipling's stories, i.e. more than a third of the total, and a similar proportion of his poems, are written in order to make the reader laugh. This should not be taken too literally: the borderline between seriousness and jest is notoriously vague, and a Frenchman will not draw it in the same place as an Englishman.

the *Plain Tales from the Hills*, for example *The Rout of the White Hussars* and *His Wedded Wife*, are merely accounts of somewhat primitive practical jokes. An example of a practical joke story from his later work on quite another scale is afforded by *The Bonds of Discipline* (1903), which describes in great detail a fantastic hoax staged by the whole complement of a British man-of-war for the benefit of a French spy.

But among the farcical tales there is a group that is different from those mentioned above, for one thing because Kipling here puts much of his usual reticence aside and tells the reader more about his private feelings, hopes and disappointments than elsewhere; but chiefly because, in contrast to the run of his farces, their real point is not the sequence of fantastic happenings that constitutes the action, but a spiritual experience which they are an attempt to express, and which is akin to that for which he uses the phrase 'the night got into my head' in *Something of Myself*. The following are the stories in question in chronological order:¹

('Brugglesmith') (1891)

My Sunday at Home (1895)

The Puzzler (1906)

The Vortex (1914)

The Prophet and the Country (1924)

Aunt Ellen (1932)

¹ 'Brugglesmith' is in brackets because it is only halfway to belonging in the group. I have not included *Steam Tactics* (1902) because there is no resolution of the tension in laughter, and because, unlike the others, it is a revenge story. I have tried to show in the next chapter that *The Prophet and the Country* definitely belongs to the stories that deal with the Revelation of Mirth, though it differs from the rest in that the sequence of grotesque events is not experienced by the 'I', but constitutes a story told him by somebody else.

The list does not include *The Village That Voted the Earth Was Flat*, *Little Foxes* and *Beauty Spots*, nor those *Stalky* tales which contain descriptions of semi-hysterical hilarity, because all these belong in a different category. In the first three the laughter is part of a revenge or retribution, and this also in some measure holds good of the *Stalky* stories. When that is the case, Kipling invariably avoids any reference to his creed of laughter as a cosmic revelation. Nor have I included the stories where laughter figures as a healing power. There are several of these, the most important being the very late story *The Miracle of Saint Jubanus* (1930). These too belong to a group by themselves, for one thing because the laughter has not the character of a 'revelation', and for another because they are not farces.

The relevant stories thus constitute a well-defined group of six. Beginning in 1891 and ending in 1932, they are spread fairly evenly over some forty years of Kipling's literary career, and the recurrence of their basic theme bears witness to his continued preoccupation with the transcendental experience they describe. All these (as also the late revenge stories, with the exception of *Little Foxes*) are told in the first person. The reader is left in no doubt that the 'I' is Kipling himself, or rather the *persona* he consistently assumes whenever he makes an appearance in his own books. But with one exception, '*Brugglesmith*'—the first of them, and one in which he has not yet quite found the pattern characteristic of the rest—he is not the principal character, and he is always represented as sufficiently detached from the events that he witnesses to enjoy them as a kind of observer, for whose benefit the whole fantastic show might have been staged.

The actual events of these tales are clearly fictitious.

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Indeed, they are so egregious that they could not very well have happened in real life. But one is left in no doubt that Kipling believes he has experienced the emotional quality that they embody, and the story has the appearance of being a vision of a perfection glimpsed in felicitous moments, or a wish dream to meet with something like it in reality.

These stories are highly 'private', in so far as they deal with emotions that most readers cannot be expected to know, whether from themselves or from literature, and into which they must find it difficult to enter. It is not easy to give a straightforward account of something that is told indirectly or symbolically. A simile will have to serve, and the reader is asked to forgive the following attempt to make 'a raid on the inarticulate', which may be likened to spattering a target with a shotgun because one knows one cannot hope to score a bull's-eye with a rifle. Lest he should think it too fanciful, I would refer to the poems on pages 17-20, of whose highly condensed language the following is a greatly amplified rendering. What happens, then, may be described as follows:

The familiar scene is exposed to a kind of shock which for a brief while makes it settle down into a pattern other than the accustomed one. The narrator suddenly finds himself in a universe governed by an internal logic other than that of his normal world, whose laws are earnestness, order and duty.¹ The cosmic powers have discarded their

¹ Cf. *The Playmate*:

Where all an earnest, baffled Earth
Blunders and trips to make us mirth

Where, from the trivial flux of Things,
Rise unconceived miscarryings
Outrageous but immortal . . .

severe mask, and their inmost essence is shown, at least for the moment, to be comic. The menaces and the sinister forces so often sensed at the back of Kipling's world are banned on this transfigured stage, where embarrassments and mishaps are merely laughable, and one can abandon oneself blissfully to happenings that become more and more outrageous as the story moves along. And this abandonment is felt as a release, or at least a respite, from the burdens and stresses of life.

He who experiences this is vouchsafed a glimpse of a comic cosmos, and at the same time a revelation of hidden meanings that have escaped him in his more sober moments. The process takes place, of course, inside his own mind, which undergoes a kind of enlargement, enabling him to discover new and exciting qualities in things that used to appear prosaic; and it is implied that what he perceives in this way is *a truth* that otherwise eludes one.¹

The experiences these stories try to describe involve, as it were, a pause in the inexorable regularity of the world. They have the effect of a private Saturnalia that produces a catharsis by the suspension of rules and distinctions that one normally has to observe. That for Kipling, who otherwise regards order as the basic principle of the universe, this should be a symbol of bliss, is a remarkable evidence of the complexity of his character. It is a complete contradiction of his usual philosophy, according to which it is only by working, doing one's duty, and meeting the challenges of fate with courage and patience that one can lead a tolerable life and preserve

¹ Cf. *The Playmate*:

She is not wisdom but, may be,
Wiser than all the Norms is She.

one's human dignity. Those who look for logic in such matters can perhaps find it in the explanation that this *is* after all only a Saturnalia, a few hours' holiday from the burden and the dust, and not applicable as a guide to ordinary conduct. It is, however, much more likely that the explanation must be sought in the contradictions of the writer's personality: a tautness, sometimes a crampedness, that is occasionally reflected in his style and in his sudden outbreaks of intolerant anger, caused him to make a cult of the only effective form of relaxation he knew, and to identify memories of a more carefree period of his life with remembered scenes of hilarity.

This motif, which is a spiritual experience that is quite intangible, and beyond the borderline of normal emotions, he undertakes to express in a story, whose external form is like that of other stories. It takes the shape of an account of some particular occasion, when the everyday scene suddenly explodes in a blaze of coloured fireworks. One bizarre event follows the other, working up towards the culmination, which manifests itself as an orgy of uncontrollable mirth. A tension is built up, to be resolved at the end of the story. Those involved in the events it describes find release in an ecstasy of laughter, so vehement as to be almost painful. It is always described in violently exaggerated terms, as if it were a fit of hysteria (a word that Kipling uses several times to describe it). The characters roll on the ground, gasp, shriek and groan, till they are on the point of suffocating:

As we passed the front-door it swung open, and showed Jimmy the artist sitting at the bottom of a newly-cleaned staircase. He waggled his hands at us, and when we entered we saw that the man was stricken speechless. His eyes grew red—red like a ferret's—and what little breath he had whistled shrilly.

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At first we thought it was a fit, and then we saw that it was mirth . . . (*The Puzzler*).

We hurried after them, for they were running unsteadily, squeaking like rabbits as they ran. We overtook them in a little nut wood half a mile up the road, where they had turned aside, and were rolling. So we rolled with them, and ceased not till we had arrived at the extremity of exhaustion (*The Puzzler*).

Framlyngham Admiral village is a good two miles from the station, and I waked the holy calm of the evening every step of the way with shouts and yells, casting myself down in the flank of the good green hedge when I was too weak to stand (*My Sunday at Home*).

In a similar passage in *The Vortex* Kipling says: 'I prostrated myself before Allah in that mirth which is more truly labour than any prayer.' Actually, these descriptions of a tension resolving in orgiastic laughter have more than a little in common with scenes of religious enthusiasm known from accounts of Revivalist meetings in England in the eighteenth and America in the nineteenth century.

I have dwelt on these descriptions of uncontrollable mirth (which incidentally occur in several other stories besides those discussed here) because they are really a very odd phenomenon, the odder the more one considers them. For otherwise Kipling is concerned to describe the refusal of Englishmen to give vocal expression to their feelings as one of the most impressive national qualities. (Compare the poem *Et Dona Ferentes*, and the poem accompanying *The Puzzler*, which has the same title as the story from which one of the above examples of hysterical laughter is taken, and which, paradoxically, is a homage to the English national habit of silence and reticence.) But when he deals with a comic experience he

describes his characters, including himself, as displaying their emotions with a physical violence of which the gesticulations of Frenchmen and Italians, so despised by the Victorians, are only a pale reflection.

The action that precedes the release in laughter follows roughly the same scheme in all the stories in question. The characters are exposed to some comic accident, whose consequences deploy from one farcical scene to the next.

As an example one may take *Aunt Ellen*, the last of this kind of story Kipling wrote. The following is only a very brief synopsis, which leaves out many details. The narrator, who is clearly meant to be Kipling himself, has been on a visit to Cambridge and drives towards London in the evening. An old lady has given him a commission: a jar of jam and an eiderdown, which he ties on to his car. The bundle falls off and is run over by two undergraduates, who are on their way to a dance in London in a state of considerable elevation. Run over, the eiderdown soaked in red jam looks much like the victim of a traffic accident, and Kipling allows the undergraduate at the wheel to remain in the belief that it is in fact a mangled body. (This use of a macabre subject for comic effect probably owes something to R. L. Stevenson's *The Wrong Box*.) Both cars continue their way after the 'body' has been stowed into one of them. After a number of wayside adventures, they reach the outskirts of London in the early dawn. There they are stopped by a policeman. When he opens the bonnet of the car the down is blown out by the ventilator and sticks to the constable and one of the undergraduates, so that they look like two monstrous birds. Then follows the usual laughter motif.

All this may not strike the reader who does not know the story as an example of the grand tradition of humour.

Nor is it. The action of these stories is not really humorous, it is comic. They are not meant to be humorous in the traditional sense, and one might even be tempted to ask if they are meant to be amusing. The author would no doubt reply that they were, but the question is really without meaning, because in that case he would not mean quite the same thing by 'amusing' as a good many of his readers. The writer's attitude to the bizarre events is of an oddly private kind, and the reader may find it difficult to share it. Sometimes, as in *Aunt Ellen*, there are overtones that are vaguely troubling or even sinister, as if this was a dream from which one would rather wake up. And in this there is nothing surprising: an atmosphere of unrest and tension is being built up to be resolved again in the laughter scene, and it communicates some of its quality to the reader.

But whether one finds them amusing or not, the comic events are not what the story is really about: it is about an adventure on the borderland of the normal, and, however important they may have been to the writer, they are slightly disconcerting to the reader who has had no experiences of that kind himself. Incidentally, I believe that a good many people do have similar accesses of a hilarity felt as a sudden expansion of the spirit. What makes Kipling stand apart is that he bases a philosophy, almost a creed, on them.

The culminating release of frantic hilarity is also of a private kind. It obviously meant much to himself, but here again he has no common ground with most of his readers, and in any case this sort of thing is very difficult to communicate in cold print. Some sort of personal contact is needed to bring it off and to impart a sense of the charged, crackling atmosphere, in the same way as one

cannot experience the mass emotion of a large assembly without being part of it. Dr Tompkins speaks of 'the infectious vigour and picturesqueness of the writing' in these passages. But though it is true that the style is vigorous, the vigour sometimes strikes one as akin to that of a convulsive fit. She also makes the acute observation that in Kipling no woman ever takes part in these orgies of laughter. They are a male prerogative. The similarity between the scenes of hilarity in these stories and those where laughter serves the purpose of revenge or retribution is entirely superficial. ~~Or rather~~, they have only this in common, that for Kipling laughter is a minister of powers that may be either friendly or hostile. In those stories that embody his cult of hilarity the laughter is always a spiritual liberation for all the implicated parties, and the chain of events that releases it is directed by chance, while in stories like *The Village That Voted the Earth Was Flat* it is part of a carefully planned revenge strategy, which results in somebody being humiliated by the derisive laughter of a large crowd of people.

But in the type of stories described in this chapter neither the writer nor the characters pursue any vendettas. On the contrary, the author has temporarily gone over to the side of Tolerance. The characters involved are innocent victims of chance, or at least not guilty of anything worse than taking themselves too seriously.

As I have said, the comic events of these stories bring about a cataclysmic reversal of the everyday order, and this is thrown into relief, in most of them, by making them take place in an environment that is the very quintessence of order or peace. The scene of *My Sunday at Home* is the most peaceful and somnolent place it is possible to imagine: a railway halt deserted in the evening,

in the midst of a landscape that breathes the profound calm of an English summer Sunday. The scene of *The Vortex* is a village idyl, and that of *The Puzzler* a decorous Victorian house in a garden, whose character is indicated by the formalistic monkey puzzle tree that gives its name to the story.

A similar effect is sometimes produced by making the actors in the comic drama persons who are normally surrounded with great dignity: in *The Puzzler* it is a Canadian Cabinet Minister who conceives the idea of testing whether monkey puzzle trees really do puzzle monkeys, and the great legal luminary Lord Lundie and a famous Royal Academician who actually send a monkey up the tree, while Lord Lundie afterwards has to use his professional skill as a pleader to pacify the angry lady of the house. In *The Vortex* the same Canadian Minister and the Agent General of the Dominion are involved in a scene where a whole village is thrown into chaos by a swarm of bees.

That these stories have a layer of meaning that goes beyond the farcical events they relate can easily be overlooked by the reader who is accustomed to find only one meaning in a story, and in fact the esoteric elements in Kipling's tales were almost wholly missed by his contemporaries. But that those that deal with the theme of Cosmic Mirth have an ulterior meaning and embody a very remarkable philosophy of laughter, Kipling shows quite clearly in some of those poems with which he used to accompany his stories, and which may be said to serve as a sort of commentary on them. Thus *Steam Tactics* (which does not belong together with the tales dealt with in this chapter—cf. p. 7, note) is accompanied by a poem entitled, somewhat cryptically, *The Necessitarian*, which runs as follows:

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I know not in whose hands are laid
To empty upon earth
From unexpected ambuscade
The very Urns of Mirth;

Who bids the Heavenly Lark arise
And cheer our solemn round—
The Jest beheld with streaming eyes
And grovellings on the ground;

Who joins the flats of Time and Chance
Behind the prey preferred,
And thrones on Shrieking Circumstance
The Sacredly Absurd

Till Laughter, voiceless through excess,
Waves mute appeal and sore,
Above the midriff's deep distress,
For breath to laugh once more.

No creed hath dared to hail him Lord,
No raptured choirs proclaim,
And Nature's strenuous Overword
Hath nowhere breathed his name.

Yet, may it be, on wayside jape,
The selfsame Power bestows
The selfsame power that went to shape
His Planet or His Rose.

This is surely a remarkable comment on Kipling's theme of liberating laughter: proceeding from a description of those paroxysms of laughter in which the 'sacredly absurd' events culminate, to a statement of his philosophy

of Cosmic Mirth, which implies that, though no religion has as yet ventured to include the God of Mirth in its Pantheon, the experiences in question may well be Divine mercies, and comparable to the creations of power and beauty.

This poem does not stand alone. In *The Legend of Mirth* it is related how, after the Creation, Allah sends four Archangels down to the earth in order to guide mankind. They all fail in their mission, and Allah then sends a Seraph to their assistance, who is to give mankind the gift of mirth. He tells the others that the cause of their failure was that they have forgotten to take account of one aspect of human life: the comic. Almost stifled with mirth at the Seraph's stories of the oddities of men, the five of them stagger back to Heaven. Their laughter is heard even in the Pit, and the damned souls understand that they are not wholly cut off from human brotherhood.

When Kipling was about sixty he wrote a Horatian ode called *To the Companions*, in which, reviewing his life, he tells us that now that he is getting to be an old man the events that appear most memorable to him are his youthful transports of mirth. The poem throws so much light on his cult of laughter that I quote it in full:

How comes it that, at even-tide
 When level beams should show most truth,
 Man, failing, takes unfailing pride
 In memories of his frolic youth?

Venus and Liber fill their hour;
 The games engage, the Law-courts prove;
 Till hardened life breeds love of power
 Or Avarice, Age's final love.

THE REVELATION OF MIRTH

Yet at the end, these comfort not—
Nor any triumph Fate decrees—
Compared with glorious, unforget-
ten innocent enormities

Of frontless days before the beard,
When, instant on the casual jest,
The God Himself of Mirth appeared
And snatched us to His heaving breast.

And we—not caring who He was
But certain He would come again—
Accepted all He brought to pass
As Gods accept the lives of men . . .

Then He withdrew from sight and speech,
Nor left a shrine. How comes it now
While Charon's keel grates on the beach,
He calls so clear: 'Rememberest thou?'

The voice that the old man hears as 'Charon's keel grates on the beach' is that of the God of Mirth, who once used to visit him and then deserted him; and his 'Rememberest thou' is a promise that he is waiting for the poet in the land of shades to 'snatch him to his heaving breast' once more. Countless people have dreamt of meetings on the other side of the grave, with a lost love, a child, or a Redeemer. But how many have centred their dreams of an after-life on the hope of recapturing the laughter of their youth?

To the last of his stories dealing with the Revelation of Mirth, *Aunt Ellen*, he appended a poem called *The Playmate*, which runs as follows:

ASPECTS OF KIPLING'S ART

She is not Folly—that I know.
Her steadfast eyelids tell me so
When, at the hour the lights divide,
She steals as summonsed to my side.

When, finger on the purséd lip;
In secret, mirthful fellowship
She, heralding new-framed delights,
Breathes, 'This shall be a Night of Nights!'

Then out of Time and out of Space
Is built an Hour and a Place
Where all an earnest, baffled Earth
Blunders and trips to make us mirth;

Where, from the trivial flux of Things,
Rise unconceived miscarryings
Outrageous but immortal, shown,
Of Her great love, to me alone . . .

She is not Wisdom but, may be,
Wiser than all the Norns is She:
And more than Wisdom I prefer
To wait on Her,—to wait on Her!

One notes that the language used to describe the adventures to which 'the playmate' guides the poet, like the passages referring to his Revelations of Mirth in *The Prophet and the Country*,¹ resembles that of mysticism: they are 'out of time and space', and they are 'immortal'. In fact, the poems that embody Kipling's philosophy of Mirth show that he believed the emotional state accompanying these adventures to be in some sort an equivalent

¹ See Chapter II.

of mystical religious experiences: like them, they are means of escaping from the prison of the ego and the tensions of existence, and to make contact with powers regarded as supernatural. He also makes it clear that he looks upon them as revelations in the literal sense of the word, in that they give a truer picture of the cosmic order than those of everyday life: 'wiser than all the Norns is she'. Like the religious mystical experience, the Revelation of Mirth is heralded by a presentiment of what is to come, and demands the complete surrender of one's own will. But Kipling is probably alone in the form which the escape from the bondage of time and the normal world order takes: not into communion with God, but into hilarity.

It is a far cry, one would think, from the comic to the romantic cult of Nature as a reflection of a divine essence. Nevertheless, Kipling's cult of laughter has this in common with the interpretation of Nature found in romantic poets like Wordsworth, that it seeks in certain experiences that are outside the boundaries of normal perception a substitute for mysticism in the religious sense.

It appears from *To the Companions* that Kipling's Revelations of Mirth belonged to his youth, and that they ceased as he grew older. In the late story *The Prophet and the Country* he says so in so many words. The atmosphere of the night and morning pieces that form its frame is the same that used to accompany the Revelation, but the latter does not materialize, and he reflects sadly that those Gates seem now to be for ever shut.¹ The mood is the same as in Wordsworth's *Intimations of Immortality*: 'Whither is fled the visionary gleam? Where is it now, the glory and the dream?'

¹ See the analysis of this story in Chapter II.

Whether Kipling really had these experiences in the form in which he describes them is a question for the biographer rather than for the student of his art, for whom the main thing is that, whether he had them or not, he found them an adequate expression of something that he felt to be true and important. But his descriptions of them have an authentic ring: it is difficult to believe that he could invent them, and that he could describe these phenomena in so much detail, in almost identical terms each time, and pursue the theme throughout the greater part of his literary career with so much appearance of profound earnestness, if he did not himself regard them as real.

On the other hand, the importance that he attached to them may well be due to the course that his own life took. It is obvious that he was not a happy man, and that he needed all the fortitude and stoicism he could summon to meet the blows that fate dealt him. No-one but a profoundly unhappy man could have written the *Hymn to Physical Pain*. Such a man would be likely to idealize a time of his life when he was young and carefree, as Kipling did in *The Song of Diego Valdes*. One cannot, therefore, exclude the possibility that these things came to assume a heightened significance in his subconscious mind as he grew older, and that they became more highly coloured in retrospect. With some writers it takes an incubation time before an experience can be turned into art, and it is sometimes modified during the process. Here again a comparison with Wordsworth is to the point.

If one reads the six stories in question in chronological order, one gets some idea of the stages by which his philosophy of Mirth developed. The first of them, 'Brugglesmith', represents only a half-way stage. It has nearly all

the elements on which the philosophy is based, but gives no indication of the metaphysical implications which he was to read into them in later life. There is the whole apparatus of comic incidents that mount towards a climax—the narrator's wanderings through the sleeping city in the early hours of the morning, accompanied by a drunken man who involves him in more and more preposterous adventures. Underlying this comic theme there is a slightly sinister effect, as of a nightmare. The story even has something of the dawn atmosphere that in the later tales heralds the culmination: the release of tension in a storm of uncontrollable laughter. But the latter motif is absent here, and the narrator remains alone on the scene without anybody to share his mirth with. This is exceptional—it is only the case in '*Brugglesmith*' and *My Sunday at Home*, the two earliest stories of this type. In the others the hilarity is always shared; and this seems more true to life: hilarity in complete isolation is surely something that very few people experience. Or perhaps the young Kipling was an exception in that respect, and the need for companions to share his mirth was a measure of his waning animal spirits as he grew older.

'*Brugglesmith*' also differs from the others in that the narrator is more implicated in the comic events, and less of an observer. He is himself the sole victim of the joke, and the final episode has the character of an act of revenge on his tormentor. The fundamental difference between '*Brugglesmith*' and the other stories is, however, that it is about a succession of comic events, while the others are about the spiritual experiences which these events produce.

But in the next story, *My Sunday at Home*, at least one aspect of the philosophy—that of the abdication of one's

own will and the abandonment of control to an unknown power as a necessary condition of being vouchsafed the Comic Experience—is fully developed and expounded as a commentary on the action:¹

I knew that so long as a man trusts himself to the current of Circumstance, reaching out for and rejecting nothing that comes his way, no harm can overtake him. It is the contriver, the schemer, who is caught by the law, and never the philosopher.

With Kipling the Comic Experience is akin to poetic inspiration:² it is a gift from unknown powers above to mankind, which otherwise is forced to labour in the inexorable machinery of The Law. Somewhere in the Government of the Cosmos there is a Power, which he calls 'the Demon of Irresponsibility' and which, in rare and felicitous moments, takes over the control of events:

Thus I argued in my lower soul but, on the higher planes of it, where thought merges into Intuition and Prophecy, my Demon of Irresponsibility sang:—'I am with you once more! Stand back and let me take charge. This night shall also be One of the Nights!'. So I stood back and waited, as I have before, on Chance and Circumstance which, accepted humbly, betray not the True Believer (*Aunt Ellen*).

The omens that herald the approach of the Demon are described several times. Something in the light and the

¹Dr Tompkins (*The Art of R.K.*, p. 45) calls attention to certain pointers in this story that seem to serve as discreet references to the pessimistic philosophy of Thomas Hardy, and concludes that Kipling's tale is meant, among other things, as a counterstatement to Hardy.

²For Kipling's theories of poetic inspiration, see Chapter III, and Dr Tompkins' interpretation of the story *Wireless* (*The Art of R.K.*, pp. 90-4).

place, and in the nerves of the narrator, tells him that he is on his way. Certain hours and lights are propitious, above all the interval between night and morning with its cold half-light, the time when one's animal spirits are at their lowest ebb and leave the mind open to other influences.

How much importance Kipling attached to this atmosphere of presage and expectation appears from the way descriptions of it recur in the stories. It is 'the fortunate hour' of *Something of Myself*, 'on the turn of sunrise, with a sou'-west breeze afoot',¹ and 'the hour the lights divide' of *The Playmate*. At the beginning of *The Vortex* the writer is walking in his garden on an early summer morning:

To me, as I have often observed elsewhere, the hour of earliest dawn is fortunate, and the wind that runs before it has ever been my most comfortable counsellor.

'Wait,' it said, all among the night's expectant rosebuds. 'To-morrow is also a day. Wait upon the Event!'

Two other stories describe, or evoke, the atmosphere that warns him that the Demon is on his way. In the first of them, *The Prophet and the Country*, they take the form of two pictures of nightfall and dawn that no-one but Kipling could have done in quite the same way. But there is no hilarity here. The theme is only a memory of past happiness, and the passages strike a note of sadness and resignation, because the writer feels that the Demon has forsaken him, and that the gates of the Paradise of Mirth are closed for him.

But the Revelation comes, after all, once more to the

¹ In the poem *The Dawn Wind*, the wind that precedes the sunrise serves a symbolic purpose: the sunrise is the Renaissance.

ageing poet, and is described in one of the last stories he wrote, *Aunt Ellen*. Or, more likely, he only dreamt of how wonderful it would be if it did. Again his Demon announces his approach: 'I am with you once more! Stand back and let me take charge. This night shall also be One of the Nights'; and again he presides over the night's events. The climax comes again, as it should, in the early morning, this time on one of the arterial roads on the outskirts of London:

I saw the zenith beginning to soften towards dawn, and the dim shoulders of the world taking shape against the first filtrations of light. It was the hour I knew of old—the one in which my Demon wrought his mightiest. Therefore, I never insult him by mirth till he has released the last foot of it. . . .¹

Dawn breathed upon that immense width of barren arterial tar, with its breadth of tintless stuff at either side. A red light marked a distant crossing.

Then follow the culminating comic events and the orgiastic laughter.

I have said that Kipling's use of laughter as a means of

¹ This is a reference to a theme of film-making that occupies a prominent place in the story. The accompanying poem *Naaman's Song* takes its cue from Naaman's reply to Elisha when the prophet tells him that he will be cured of leprosy if he bathes seven times in the Jordan (II Kings v. 12): 'Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?' II Kings v is one of Kipling's favourite Biblical texts, and he often refers to it. In *Naaman's Song* the Jordan clearly stands for Hollywood. The poem must have some connection with the film theme of the story, which at first sight looks like a pure digression. I believe that Kipling wanted to suggest an analogy between what he regarded as the preposterous plots of contemporary films and the crazy events that lead up to the Comic Experience in the story: if it comes to that sort of thing, he and his 'demon' can do better than Hollywood.

revenge or retribution as in *Little Foxes* and *The Village That Voted the Earth Was Flat*, where an obnoxious character is humiliated by the derisive laughter of a large crowd, does not belong under the present theme. But there is another recurrent motif that has some affinity with it: the laughter that purifies the mind of baseness, rancour or hatred. It occurs, for example, in *The Enemies to Each Other*, where the love-hate quarrel of the first man and woman is resolved in a fit of laughter. (Being a woman, Eve only laughs 'aloud and merrily', and not like the males in the farcical stories.) In *My Son's Wife* laughter shares with Kipling's other symbol of purification, the river in spate, the function of epitomizing Midmore's salvation from the life of false values he has been leading among the London intelligentsia.

Laughter also represents one of those tests that occur so often in Kipling's stories, and which must be passed before one is accepted by a new environment: that Midmore and his old miscreant of a tenant, Mr Sidney, join in a fit of uproarious laughter signifies that Sidney accepts him as his feudal overlord, and that from now on he cannot cheat him as he pleases, but only within certain limits laid down by tradition.

In *The Tree of Justice* King Henry sits in a black mood, ready to send those who displease him to the gallows, when the electric atmosphere is dissolved in a storm of laughter at the sight of the fool Rahere's waving legs: 'Like a storm breaking, our grave King laughed, stamped and reeled with laughter till the stand shook. So, like a storm, this strange thing passed!' In *The Wrong Thing* Benedetto means to knife Hal in jealousy of the favour shown him by King Henry, but they both go off into a fit of uncontrollable mirth at the realization that what

the parsimonious King knighted Hal for was not his art, but for saving him thirty pounds. Shaking with laughter Benedetto drops his knife. The pair of them roar and bay and whoop with laughter. 'The old crust of hatred round his heart was broke up and carried away by laughter', and they reel away, arms round each other's neck.

And finally laughter is one of the beneficent powers in Kipling's theme of Healing. In *The Miracle of Saint Jubanus* a shell-shocked French soldier comes back to his village as a wreck of his former self. Both Love and Faith, in the persons of his sweetheart and the wise old curé, fail to exorcize the spirit of despair that has possessed him, but what they cannot do is achieved by a grotesque scene, where the village atheist and two choir boys get entangled in the curé's umbrella during divine service, and the whole congregation is swept by a gale of laughter.

CHAPTER II

THE BROKEN SPRING

THE PROPHET AND THE COUNTRY

FIRST published in 1924, *The Prophet and the Country* is one of those late stories in which close study is likely to uncover more than one layer of meaning, and where one must be prepared to find a technique involving symbolism, indirectness of presentation, counterbalancing passages with a contrapuntal effect, and hints at recondite analogies between the themes of which the tale is built up. It is dealt with at some length by Dr Tompkins, who has given numerous extremely perspicacious and convincing interpretations of the more difficult tales.¹ The present one she finds more resistant to interpretation than any of the others, and she regards it as something of an artistic failure, because the different themes that Kipling had on hand are not properly fused, and do not appear really to belong together.² This is no doubt how it strikes most readers, and at one time I shared her estimate of it myself. To my knowledge, nobody else has attempted a detailed analysis of the story.

This chapter offers an analysis which differs from that of Dr Tompkins, among other things, in that I believe that, by means of certain clues carefully planted by the writer, the two main strands of the tale can be shown to belong together and to present fairly close parallels to each other,

¹ Tompkins, *op. cit.*

² *Ibid.*, pp. 251-2.

in fact that they are meant to be two variations on the same fundamental theme. This is, indeed, what one would expect to find in a story of that date, but in this case Kipling's habit of making his clues inconspicuous, as if he were at pains to baffle the reader, is even more in evidence than usual.¹ On closer examination, however, the story turns out to present an intricate and carefully worked-out pattern.

Before coming to the interpretation, it will be necessary to give a brief summary of the story, at the same time bringing in certain details that appear to contain clues to its meaning. The reader is asked to bear in mind that there are very few real digressions in Kipling's late stories. Descriptive passages will often be found to have a function beyond mere description, and what looks like a casual remark may contain something of importance for the understanding of the writer's intentions.²

The narrator (whom, for reasons that will become apparent below, we may as well call Kipling) is driving along the Great North Road. He passes through a Midland area, whose dreary monotony is briefly described: not only the towns, but also the houses, are so absolutely alike that only hereditary instinct enables their inhabitants to distinguish between them. He comes to a market town

¹ The introductory poem is clearly about Prohibition in America and the futility of attempting to make people more virtuous by force. I cannot find any help in the obscure fragment from *Gow's Watch* appended to the story, except that 'the Mountain Men' are described in a way that shows that Kipling had the Americans in mind.

² It goes without saying that a synopsis like this does not give an adequate impression of the obscurity of the story to those who have not read it, because the synopsis extracts all the points that seem relevant to the interpretation. In the story itself, these points are buried in other matter.

full of cattle carrying red tickets on their rumps, where 'an English-speaking policeman' stops him to inspect his driving licence, and an attendant wants to paste a label 'precisely like those on the behinds of the bullocks' on his windshield, explaining that it will save him trouble with licence control on the road: 'This is your protection. Everybody does it.' Driving on, he finds that the cars he meets are in fact 'protected' in this way.

But late in the afternoon he crosses the boundary of this area of 'witch-doctoring' and finds himself in open country. 'Here the car, without warning, sobbed and stopped. One does not expect the make-and-break of the magneto—that tiny two-inch spring of finest steel—to fracture, and by the time we had found the trouble, night shut down on us.'¹ As there is nothing else for it, he curls up in the front seat to wait for morning.

There follows a description of nightfall on the empty road, marvellously concentrated and in Kipling's best manner, and then the following comment:

It was long since I had spent a night in the open, and the hour worked on me. Time was when such nights, and the winds that heralded their dawns, had been fortunate and blessed; but those Gates, I thought, were for ever shut.

A caravan has come to a halt near him, and its owner, an American called Tarworth, invites him inside. Tarworth tells him about his ambition in life, viz. to make a film forecasting the effects of Prohibition on the future of America, and proceeds to describe the scenario in great detail: the introduction of Prohibition was an act of 'Presumption' from the start, and the American Woman,

¹ Who are 'we'? Throughout the story the narrator appears to be travelling alone. It looks like a real oversight on the part of Kipling, a very rare, if not unique, thing in his late tales.

who provided the driving force behind it, rashly commits an act of even greater presumption when it appears to have been successfully carried into effect. In order to show the world the full measure of her triumph and 'what She has made of Her Men', she causes all barriers to alcohol to be removed. But in so doing, she has overlooked the fact that in the meantime the Americans have become 'virginized' to alcohol, so that when it is available again it ravages them as firewater did the Red Indians, or the measles the South Sea Islanders.

Tarworth's scenario and his specimen photographs exhibit their progressive degradation. They sell their title-deeds, factories and houses to European providers of the stuff. Military occupation follows the liquor traffic, and in the end the few surviving Americans are herded off by a remnant of the Redskins, whose fate they have copied, to reservations in Yellowstone Park. But, Tarworth explains, the film was never made. The project was regarded as un-American, and he was hounded out of the States by public opinion.

When Tarworth finishes his story, the new day has begun to dawn. There follows a delicate evocation of the beauty and freshness of the morning scene, which ends:

And that wind, which runs before the actual upheaval of the sun, swept out of the fragrant lands to the East, and touched my cheek—as many times it had touched it before, on the edge, or at the ends, of inconceivable experiences.

My companion breathed deeply, while the low glare searched the folds of his coat and the sags and wrinkles of his face. We heard the far-off pulse of a car through the infinite, clean-born, light-filled stillness. It neared and stole round the bend—a motor-hearse on its way to some early or distant funeral, one side of the bright oak coffin showing beneath the

pall, which had slipped a little. Then it vanished in a blaze of wet glory from the sun-drenched road, amid the songs of a thousand birds.

Mr Tarworth laid his hand on my shoulder. 'Say, Neighbour,' he said. 'There's somethin' very soothin' in the Concept of Death after all.'

Then he set himself, kindly and efficiently, to tow me towards Doncaster, where, when the day's life should begin, one might procure a new magneto make-and-break—that tiny two-inch spring of finest steel, failure of which immobilizes any car.

The story ends here. It will be seen that, in accordance with a common pattern in Kipling's late tales, it consists of a narrative within a frame, the latter made up of an introduction and a sort of postscript. In the stories from this period the frame is not a mere ornament: it is intimately connected with the narrative that is sandwiched between its two parts, and it often plays a variation on the narrative, so that the frame and narrative complement and enhance each other.

I believe this is also the case here, and that the story has a dual theme, the fundamental idea of which appears both in the frame and in the narrative. Briefly, the themes are: (a) a criticism of certain aspects of American civilization, and (b) the motif that figures so largely in Kipling's writings, viz. his failure, as he grew older, to receive revelations of what for want of a better term may be called 'Cosmic Mirth'. These two themes are presented in this story as showing points of resemblance to such a degree that the same symbol—the broken steel spring of the magneto—is used to characterize both of them.

To grasp the full meaning, the reader must be familiar with Kipling's concept of the transcendental experience

above referred to as a revelation of Cosmic Mirth. This is dealt with in the previous chapter. The gist of it is that it is his equivalent for the Enlightenment of the religious mystic, and that, like the latter, it frees one from the bonds of time and circumstance. Kipling believed he had lost the capacity for having these experiences, as Wordsworth describes himself as having lost his illumination in *Intimations of Immortality*, and that this had deprived his life of much of what made it worth living.

My contention, then, is that *The Prophet and the Country* is about two themes: American civilization and the lost Revelation, and that these two themes are presented as being analogous.

First then the transcendental Experience. Both sections of the frame deal with it, and in both cases the reference to it is placed in passages of great beauty, which give the impression of being the result of much thought and care. The introductory section of the frame describes his expectation of the Experience, and the final section the disappointment of his hopes (see, however, the last page of the present chapter). To load the frame to such an extent with this theme is surely an indication of the importance Kipling attached to its function in the tale, seeing, as I have said, that the frame is rarely, if ever, a mere ornament in his late stories.

One further notes that the obviously symbolic phrase about the broken steel spring of the magneto occurs in practically identical form in both sections of the frame (cf. the quotations above), and that it is used in the paragraph that contains the first mention of the Experience. I believe the symbol is meant to apply *both* to the American theme and to the theme of the transcendental Experience, and thus to link the two themes together.

In the case of the transcendental Experience, the broken spring symbolizes, of course, the loss of Kipling's once possessed power to receive the gift of Cosmic Mirth. What, then, does it stand for in the American narrative? One notices that the word Tarworth uses of the way in which America has challenged Nemesis in first introducing, and then repealing, Prohibition, is 'Presumption'. This is obviously meant to be a key word—it is repeated again and again, and the American nation is described as the Children of Presumption. What, then, is presumption meant to convey? It is the Sin of Pride, manifesting itself as an interference in the dictates of Nature, and a failure to understand that there are things that men cannot do with impunity, because of the limits set by Nature. This, incidentally, is a favourite idea of Kipling's; it is a sin against what he elsewhere called 'the Gods of the Copy-book Headings', meaning rules of human conduct that are so well-trying and so obvious that they have become platitudes, though disregard of them inevitably results in disaster.

The two magnificent descriptions of night and morning in the open country counterbalance Tarworth's picture of an entirely artificial civilization (for the theme of Prohibition is clearly meant to be only an example of something in American civilization in general that Kipling regards as running counter to Nature). This, then, is another connecting link between the frame and the narrative. The 'denaturalization' of Transatlantic civilization is further symbolized in a brief sentence: 'A puff of air from the woods licked through the open door of the caravan, trailing a wreath of mist with it. He (Tarworth) pushed the door home.'

In the American narrative, the broken spring thus

stands for the loss of that intuitive wisdom that keeps a nation healthy, a loss that causes the downfall of an otherwise 'kindly and efficient' people—for in the light of Kipling's usual practice, even these two inconspicuous words in the final paragraph are likely to have a function in the story. (It is possible that the above-quoted passage to the effect that even the Midlanders have 'heredity' to help them in their dismal and standardized environment may be meant to emphasize this. For throughout the American narrative there is an implied contrast with the Old World, and the lack of intuitive wisdom is regarded as something specifically American. This is clearly brought out, for example, in the accompanying fragment from *Gow's Watch*.)

I believe there may be a further refinement on the Experience motif. In the two passages in the story where Kipling speaks of this, he does not mention the 'demon' into whose hands one must deliver oneself in order to have the revelation of Cosmic Mirth. But it is noteworthy that the demon *is* mentioned in another connection: when Tarworth is about to begin his narrative, he asks Kipling if he has ever heard of Nebraska, and 'I found myself (under the influence of night and my demon) denying all knowledge of the United States.' This is because he does not want Tarworth to be on his guard when he tells his story. The latter consists of a pretty grotesque sequence of events, each of them leading up to something even more startling. In other words, it bears some resemblance to the farcical plots which Kipling used as vehicles for his idea of Cosmic Mirth. The very phrase 'under the influence of night and my demon' recalls his usual style when writing about his revelation.

And to go even further: when one knows how much

Kipling was in the habit of packing into what looks like a fortuitous remark in his late stories, I do not think it is too far-fetched to read a special significance into the passage about his demon quoted above: this time his demon does not grant him the usual train of farcical and grotesque events which are the outward embodiment of the revelation of Cosmic Mirth, *on his own account*—he has to be content with experiencing them vicariously, through a story told by somebody else: a sad comment on his own decline in this respect. If this is intended, we have here another link between the American theme and the Experience theme.

There are other hints at a parallelism between the frame and the narrative which it encloses. Thus, Kipling too has had a taste of the enforced conformity that drove Tarworth from his country: the windscreen label, which is exactly like the tickets on the behinds of the bullocks, the 'protection' which he has to accept, and which he finds that everybody else has also accepted, and the monotonous piece of England where all the houses are alike. He and the American are fellow-fugitives from conformity, who meet in a territory where its mandate does not run: in an open space where one can smell the trees and feel the morning breeze.

The word demon is also in another way a link between the frame and the American narrative. When Kipling speaks of his demon in his stories it is always the spirit that leads him on to the revelation of Cosmic Mirth. But he also had another demon. To my knowledge, he only appears in *Something of Myself*, where he occurs again and again as a mentor that guides Kipling's pen and warns him where to stop. What made the American people go wrong in Tarworth's film may be described by saying that they did not listen to the promptings of their demon.

It is true that *Something of Myself* was not written when our story appeared. But if I am right in thinking that the word demon is here one of those double-faced clues that point to both themes in the story, the hint would not be more difficult to take than most of the other veiled hints in his late stories. For the demon in *Something of Myself* is clearly none other than the 'daimon' of Socrates, of whom after all a good many readers must have heard. I note that the definition of the word in *Webster's New International Dictionary* is 'that power which warned Socrates against certain courses of action'. Could anything fit the 'presumption' of the American Woman better?

For a last clue to the analogies between the frame and Tarworth's story, I would ask the reader to go back to the beginning of the synopsis, where the attendant says of the windscreen label: 'This is your *protection*', and to the passage where Kipling speaks of the country where all cars he meets 'are "*protected*" like my own' as an area of *witch-doctoring*. There is something queer about the phrases here italicized by me; they are not quite the words one would expect in the context; they stick out as if they were meant to convey something particular. They kept me wondering till I realized that Prohibition in Tarworth's story was due to the desire of the American Woman to protect Her Men from the temptation to drink, and that witch-doctoring is a remarkably apt word to describe her activities, carrying, as it does, a twofold suggestion: her interference in the normal course of things is contrary to known scientific facts (the effects of 'virginization'), like the cures of an African witch-doctor, and is the result of her obsession with a fetish. And her propaganda for Prohibition produces a hysterical atmosphere like that of a witch-infested village.

Finally, apart from all this, what is the meaning of the arresting symbol of the motor-hearse that approaches round the bend in the stillness of the morning instead of the hoped-for opening of the Gates of Illumination? Merely a drastic emblem of frustration: the old man, who had hoped for a renewal of the 'inconceivable experiences' of his youth, receives instead a reminder that not only youth, but life, will soon be over? Is it as simple as that? What of the passage about the pall that has 'slipped down a little'? That sort of thing usually means something in Kipling. Might it not be meant to recall a better-known symbol—the curtain, or the veil, that is drawn aside? I am inclined to think that what he had in mind is the idea he also expressed in *To the Companions*: that death is not the end, and that, when 'Charon's bark grates on the beach', he will hear the God of Mirth calling to him again from across the Styx. If this is so, the ultimate meaning of the theme of the hoped-for Illumination in this story is not frustration, but a promise. As in Eliot's *Four Quartets*, the final note is one of reconciliation and the resolution of doubts and dismays expressed earlier in the story.

CHAPTER III

THE ARTIST AND THE WORLD

IN THE stories Kipling wrote as a young man in India one sometimes senses a certain uneasiness at belonging to a caste like that of journalism and literature that had no place in the Anglo-Indian official hierarchy, and that received scant respect from those administrators and soldiers for whom he conceived an admiration that lasted during most of his life.¹ The doers were the giants of his universe, and it was slightly uncomfortable to belong to the dealers in words. This is reflected in the story called *A Conference*

¹ They tend to monopolize the role of leading characters in his earlier books. In those of his old age, however, there is an almost demonstrative change. In the stories of the first world war the protagonists are often lower middle-class people. This is true even of two stories the theme of which is very elevated, viz. the victory of love over death: *A Madonna of the Trenches* and *The Wish House*. The villain of *Beauty Spots* is an Establishment type. All this looks like the older Kipling's 'recantations' of beliefs that he had once put on record. Another example of this is the character of Mrs Ashcroft in *The Wish House*, whose matter-of-fact and slightly cynical attitude to her employers, and her total lack of gratitude for their kindness—her comment on the life-pension they allow her is that they must have figured out that she is not long for this world—look almost like a *démenti* of his earlier descriptions of feudal relations between masters and servants. Similarly, the picture of his beloved Sussex in this tale is pointedly de-romanticized: a country of roaring bus traffic, football crowds, and radio fans. Dr Tompkins (op. cit., pp. 146 ff.) has convincingly shown that *Dayspring Mishandled* is not one of his usual revenge stories, but another 'recantation': a criticism of his own cult of revenge motifs.

of *the Powers* (1890), in which a famous writer meets three young lieutenants just back from the war in Burma, learns to his dismay that they know all about aspects of life totally unknown to himself, and ends by 'blaspheming his own art'. The 'Powers' of the title are, of course, the Pen and the Sword, and the Sword makes the more impressive show of the two.

Another evidence of the almost apologetic attitude of the young writer to his profession takes the form of a joke: he pretends to be ignorant of things that every literary man would know: 'books written by a man called Comte, I think, and a man called Spencer' (*The Conversion of Aurelian McGoggin*). This trick, which occurs several times in his earliest stories, is, of course, not meant to be taken seriously. Nevertheless, it has an air of being a discreet disclaimer of literary pretensions that his Sahib public would think affected. Anyway, the device is significant—what other writer of his calibre would have used it?

But this is an attitude which in the long run is not comfortable to live with for a writer, and already in *The Children of the Zodiac* (1891) we find him expounding a philosophy of the role of the artist that remained, on the whole, unchanged throughout the rest of his life.¹ It is placed at the end of *Many Inventions*, which may be taken as an indication of the importance he attached to it.

The story goes as follows: though the six children of

¹ In his public speeches there are many apologetic references to his profession. These should, however, not be taken too literally. They have a look of being common form: speaking to an audience which largely consists of 'doers', he wants to be polite to his hosts and to avoid the impression that his literary fame has made him feel superior to them. It is quite clear from what he had written by then that he ascribed a very high role to his craft.

the Zodiac—the Ram, the Bull, Leo, the Twins and the Girl—are gods, they live in fear of the six Houses to which they belong: the Scorpion, the Balance, the Crab, the Fishes, the Archer and the Waterman. They descend to earth, where they are at first worshipped as divine beings. Leo and the Girl become lovers. At the sight of human suffering they gradually put off their godhead, and identify themselves with the men and women who live under the threat of the death-dealing Archer and Crab.

The Archer represents sudden death, and the Crab (cancer) slow and painful death. Leo and the Girl realize that some day they will themselves be killed by the Crab. For Kipling disease, especially cancer and madness, symbolizes the forces that threaten human happiness, and the present story is the first to deal with the cancer motif, which he was to resume time and again.

The two former gods, who voluntarily have assumed the fate that awaits all human beings, find consolation in the gift of laughter, and Leo discovers that he is a poet and that he can help his fellow-men to overcome their fear of death by his songs. The task that he thus takes upon himself is humiliating, even degrading. He is regarded as an idler who lives on the work of others. His audiences contemptuously throw pennies to him and insist on dressing him up in peacock feathers and a coat of shreds and patches; and he finds himself contracting petty human weaknesses, such as jealousy of rival singers. The other children of the Zodiac also cease to be gods. The Bull lends his strength to a cultivator and draws his plough for him; the Ram becomes a prize animal, and the Twins ordinary human babies.

One day the Girl feels the mark of the Crab on her

breast. Knowing that this means death, she tells Leo that he must go on singing after he has lost her. One by one the children of the Zodiac are killed by the Houses in whose power they are. Last of them, Leo feels the grip of the Crab on his throat as he is singing. He entreats the slayer to let him live long enough to see the world recognize his art, but even that is denied him.

Towards the end of the story we are told:

Half the young men in the world conceived that they too might be Gods without knowing it. A half of that half grew impossibly conceited, and died early. A half of the remainder strove to be Gods and failed, but the other half accomplished four times more work than they would have done under any other delusion. . . .

Leo was the last of the Children of the Zodiac. After his death there sprang up a breed of little mean men, whimpering and howling because the Houses killed them and theirs, who wished to live for ever without any pain. They did not increase their lives but they increased their torments miserably. . . .

The story is clearly an allegory about Death (the Houses), Art (Leo), and Love (the Girl), while the Bull stands for Power.¹ Leo is the chief character, and the emphasis is on Art, which is represented as reconciling men to the otherwise intolerable prospect of death. The

¹ It is possible that *The Children of the Zodiac* is an early example of the multivalence of symbols characteristic of Kipling's late manner, which causes the stories to have several levels of meaning. If so, the second level here is the loss of youth and of the optimism that makes the young believe that somehow they are exceptions, and immune from the troubles and insecurities of their elders. This subject is linked with that of the role of the artist in *Cold Iron* (see p. 49).

role of the artist is described as one of the very greatest importance, but also as painful and frustrating for himself, because his public regards him as a mere entertainer: something of Kipling's old uneasiness at belonging to the talkers, and not to the doers, remains, and as an artist he is not quite happy about belonging to a fraternity that includes 'little mean men who wish to live for ever without any pain'—presumably the decadents and hedonists of the 90's. As he grew older this element receded more and more into the background, giving place to a much more unqualified sense of the dignity of his calling.

But while the role Kipling from now on assigns to the artist is a high and noble one, there remains one trace of his youthful attitude to art, or possibly a perfectly genuine self-criticism: when speaking of his own achievements he almost systematically refrains from speaking of *art* and substitutes for this concept that of a craft, like marquetry or jewellery, as if he wanted to indicate that he regarded himself as a craftsman rather than an artist.¹ This may give the reader a wrong idea of his attitude to his work, seeing that mere technical proficiency is generally regarded as inferior to true art. But this is not what he meant to imply: craftsmanship, even the very word, was for him endowed with an almost magic significance and symbolized something that he regarded as one of the chief conditions of human worth and dignity: the ability to master some particular kind of trade or job to perfection. Anybody who does that, he is apt to describe as a crafts-

¹ This applies, however, only to the passages where he is writing *en clair*. In stories like *The Bull That Thought* and *'Teem'*, where the theme of art is expressed symbolically, the words 'Art' and 'Artist' are repeated over and over again, no doubt as a deliberate effect.

man, for example the dispensing chemist in *Wireless* and the tobacconist in *In the Interests of the Brethren*. Perhaps part of the attraction of the word was that it suggested something tangible and akin to the world's ordinary work, and thus ranged the poet among the doers. For he preserved to the last a contempt, even a hatred, of 'the talkers'. His portraits of intellectuals, including practically all Liberals, are savage caricatures, like that of the members of the Immoderate Left in *My Son's Wife*.

While the service that the artist renders mankind is given very high praise in *The Children of the Zodiac*, it does not bring any glory to himself; his calling is regarded as humble and humiliating, both by himself and his audiences, and his only reward for putting off his god-head and assuming the uncertainties of human life is the knowledge that he is helping his fellow-men. But already *The Last Rhyme of True Thomas* (1893) sounds another note: the poet knows himself to be superior even to the King. The King seeks out Thomas and tells him that he intends to make him a knight. The poet replies that he does not care for such honours, enjoying, as he does, the freedom of another country beyond the sway of earthly rulers. He goes on to give him a taste of his power: first he plunges him into black melancholy by recalling to him the hopes and loves of his lost youth and the hidden shames of his life. Then he sends his spirits soaring by reminding him of the pomp and glory of war. He concludes:

I ha' harpit a Shadow out o' the sun
 To stand before your face and cry;
 I ha' armed the earth beneath your heel
 And over your head I ha' dusked the sky.

ASPECTS OF KIPLING'S ART

I ha' harpit ye up to the Throne o' God,
I ha' harpit your midmost soul in three,
I ha' harpit ye down to the Hinges o' Hell,
And—ye—would—make—a Knight o' me!

In *My New-Cut Ashlar*, which takes the form of a prayer to 'the Great Overseer', he speaks of the artist's work as being akin to God's:

(The Great Overseer) Who lest all thought of Eden fade,
Brings Eden to the craftsman's brain—
Godlike to muse o'er his own Trade
And manlike stand with God again!

The story *Cold Iron*, significantly placed first in *Rewards and Fairies*, is, among other things, an allegory on the fate of the Artist, analogous to *The Children of the Zodiac*. It is in connection with this story that Kipling says in *Something of Myself* (p. 190):

Since the tales had to be read by children, before people realized that they were meant for grown-ups . . . I worked the material in three or four overlaid tints and textures, which might or might not reveal themselves according to the shifting light of sex, youth, and experience.

In this case the 'layer' that addresses itself to children is a fairy tale, about a boy who grows up among 'the People of the Hills', a second layer is about the Artist, and a third is, I believe, about the passing of the enthusiasms and high spirits of youth and the coming of middle age. No doubt there is also an autobiographical element, as in all his references to art, in that they describe his own experiences as an artist, sometimes overtly and sometimes by implication.

The story runs as follows: Sir Huon, the King of Fairyland, and his Queen, Lady Esclairmonde, desire 'to act and influence on folk in housen' (a phrase that is repeated again and again). To that end they adopt a human baby, the son of a slave woman who has died soon after giving birth to him. They know that the adoption is subject to certain conditions; thus he must be kept from Cold Iron till he is ready to return to the world of men, and the moment when he first touches iron will decide his further fate. The same night when he enters Fairyland, Puck, who tells the story, sees a smith, in whom he recognizes Thor, forging some object and flinging it away in the grass.

The boy is given the education of a prince of Fairyland, which mainly consists in learning magic. But he early feels attracted to 'the folk in housen', and at night he roams about with Puck, exploring the habitations of men. In this connection Kipling significantly uses the phrase 'the night got into his head', the same that he employed in *Something of Myself* to describe his own mysterious nocturnal visitations. The magic chiefly takes the form of conjuring up grandiose visions, and clearly stands for the poetic imagination, as will appear from the following passage, which Kipling singled out in *Something of Myself* (p. 189) as the best of that kind he ever wrote:

One hot night I saw the Boy roving about here wrapped in his flaming discontents. There was flash on flash on the clouds, and rush on rush of shadows down the valley till the shaws were full of his hounds giving tongue, and the woodways were packed with his knights in armour riding down into the water-mists—all his own magic, of course. Behind them you could see great castles lifting slow and splendid on arches of moonshine, with maidens waving their hands at the windows, which all turned into roaring rivers; and then would come

the darkness of his own young heart wiping out the whole slateful. But boy's magic doesn't trouble me—or Merlin's for that matter. I followed the Boy by the flashes and the whirling wildfire of his discontent, and oh, but I grieved for him! Oh, but I grieved for him! He pounded back and forth like a bullock in a strange pasture—sometimes alone—sometimes waist-deep among his shadow-hounds—sometimes leading his shadow-knights on a hawk-winged horse to rescue his shadow-girls. I never guessed he had such magic at his command; but it's often the way with boys.

Watching the Boy's magic, Sir Huon and Lady Esclairmonde see him coming to a halt and touching something on the ground. They understand that it is Cold Iron, and that his future will be decided by what the object is. Is it a sceptre, or a sword, or the clasp of a book? But when he picks it up they see that it is a slave-ring. He puts it round his neck and snaps the catch home. Puck explains what that will mean for him:

The virtue of the ring is only that he must go among folk in housen henceforward, doing what they want done, or what he knows they need, all Old England over. Never will he be his own master, nor yet any man's. He will get half he gives, and give twice what he gets, till his life's last breath; and if he lays aside his load before he draws that last breath, all his work will go for naught.

Puck's curiously offhand account of what became of the Boy must, one would think, have bewildered Dan and Una, to whom the story was a fairy tale pure and simple, and should have a happy ending:

When morning came, Cold Iron was master of him and his fortune, and he went to work among folk in housen. Presently he came across a maid like-minded with himself, and they

were wedded and had bushels of children, as the saying is. Perhaps you will meet some of his breed, this year . . . Isn't it getting on for breakfast time? I'll walk with you a piece.

The idea, it will be seen, is very like that of *The Children of the Zodiac*: the poet sacrifices himself in order to help mankind, losing his superhuman status in doing so. But *Cold Iron* has some curious features: in the former tale he serves mankind by means of his art. Here he apparently ceases to be an artist when he joins the world of men. It is not quite easy to see what Kipling meant by this; my own guess is that this trait serves the purpose of one of the other 'layers' of meaning: the theme of romantic youth whose poetic imagination, high spirits, restlessness and longings subside into staid middle age under the cares of everyday life (cf. the above-mentioned night-piece, more particularly the phrases 'the darkness of his own young heart', 'his flaming discontents', and 'I never guessed he had such magic at his command; but it's often the way with boys').¹ The finding of *Cold Iron* would then symbolize the first contact with harsh reality. Or can it be that the boy's servitude in the world of men is merely a not very felicitous symbol for the idea that, like Leo in *The Children of the Zodiac*, he uses the gift of Art for the benefit of mankind?

Another odd thing is that we never learn the name of the chief character, who is throughout referred to as 'the Boy'. This is of course a deliberate device, and no doubt meant to emphasize that the story is not about an individual, but about a type: the Artist. The purpose of Puck's apparently cynical tone in reporting what happened to him in after life is less easy to see, but that too must be a

¹ The night piece also has something in common with Mowgli's nocturnal run through the jungle in *The Spring Running*.

calculated effect. Perhaps it is meant to suggest that Art is a severe mistress, that the career of the true artist is beset with trouble and sufferings, and that in a way it is a happy release for the Boy to be freed from his 'flaming discontents'.

Puck's mention of 'his breed', whom Dan and Una may 'meet this year', must refer to the story *Simple Simon* in the same collection. The implication is, then, that among the folk in housen the poet is regarded as 'simple', i.e. not quite right in the head. In making Leo in *The Children of the Zodiac* and the Boy in the present tale sacrifice superhuman gifts in order to be of service to mortals, Kipling ranges the Artist with the stone-age man in *The Knife and the Naked Chalk* who saves his tribe from the ravages of the wolves by getting knives from the forest people, and who has to pay for this by sacrificing an eye to the gods, and afterwards by losing the fellowship of the people of his tribe, who insist on regarding him as a god, and not as one of themselves. In fact, Kipling regards those who give up their happiness, or their lives, for the good of mankind as Saviours, in the religious sense, as he made clear in *The Church that was at Antioch*, where the Roman officer who dies in the service of order and peace is pointedly likened to the crucified Christ.¹

In 1917 Kipling addressed a poem called *A Recantation* to the music-hall artiste Marie Lloyd, who like himself lost a son in the war. There was a time, he says, when he regarded her and her art as 'o'erblown and over-bold', but he remembers that his dead son loved her songs, and that she sang them with unfailing verve on the night when she learnt that hers had been killed in France. Now, he recognizes her as a fellow-artist, who shares his own

¹ See p. 114 ff.

burden of having to go on singing though 'suffering vacant days', and 'though vultures rend their soul':

Singer to children¹! Ours possessed
Sleep before noon—but thee,
Wakeful each midnight for the rest
No holocaust shall free!

Yet they who use the word assigned
To hearten and make whole,
Not less than Gods have served mankind,
Though vultures rend their soul.

The phrase 'the word assigned' reflects Kipling's belief that poetic inspiration is something coming from outside—like 'the Powers at work through space, a long distance away' in *Wireless*—for which the poet can hardly take credit to himself. As Dr Tompkins has shown, this idea constitutes the most important level of meaning in this story, which describes how a man, whose circumstances and surroundings are similar to those of Keats when he wrote 'The Eve of St Agnes' (and who has never even heard of Keats), reproduces passages from the poem in a trance. The symbolism by which this is expressed is borrowed from the recent discovery of radio waves as a means of transmitting messages.

It is significant that in both *The Children of the Zodiac* and *Cold Iron* the artist comes from another world than that of men: Leo from the realm of the gods and 'the Boy' from that of the fairies. The view of poetic inspiration

¹ i.e. the young soldiers home from the front.

² Tompkins, op. cit., pp. 90–4. On another level *Wireless* deals with the way in which a poem gets written, and the poet's struggle to find the right word. This is also the subject of Kipling's late story: *Proofs of Holy Writ*.

described above is not a mere piece of decorative fiction: it is quite clear from what Kipling tells us in *Something of Myself* that he genuinely believed that in favoured moments an unknown Power, which he refers to as 'my demon',¹ took over the guidance of his pen.

But what is perhaps Kipling's most remarkable disquisition on the theme of the Artist is found in one of his late tales: *The Bull That Thought*—found, that is, after one has discovered the key to the intricate symbolic pattern of the story. For in *The Bull That Thought* the more esoteric layers of meaning are indicated so indirectly that by comparison such stories as *The Children of the Zodiac* are almost written *en clair*. But it is worth the trouble to read *The Bull That Thought* with care. It is a fascinating story, and if studied closely it reveals itself as a highly complicated structure, in which each part interlocks with the others; where there is hardly a sentence that does not serve as a clue to a hidden meaning, and where practically every single device pertaining to his late manner is employed.

¹ This is a different 'demon' from the one whom he describes as taking control when the Revelation of Mirth is at hand: it is a demon in the Socratic sense, i.e. a mentor. (Cf. pp. 37-8.)

CHAPTER IV

THE BULL THAT THOUGHT

The Bull That Thought was first published in 1924. Kipling makes no mention of it in *Something of Myself*. It is accompanied by a poem called *Alnaschar and the Oxen*, which at first glance seems to throw no light on the story, but which, it will later on appear, is nevertheless of some importance for the interpretation. The tale is passed over, or only briefly mentioned, in all the principal books about Kipling, and I know of no attempt to find an esoteric meaning in it. The following is an attempt to show that, like many of Kipling's late stories, it has several layers of meaning, and to interpret it in the light of this assumption.

The scaffolding of the tale is exactly the same as in *The Prophet and the Country*: the 'I' (whom we may as well call Kipling) meets a man, who tells him a story. This story is enclosed in a frame consisting of an introduction and a conclusion. The introduction, which is short (about three pages), describes the circumstances under which Kipling meets the narrator. The conclusion is exceptionally short, and takes up only a few lines.

As in the case of the other tales dealt with in the present book, it will be necessary to begin by giving a synopsis, in which are included passages that look as if they might be relevant to an analysis of the story, and again the reader is warned that this procedure might give him an exaggerated idea of the weight of the resulting clues, because these are

extracted from the context: to test the interpretation, he will have to go to the story itself.

At the opening of the tale, Kipling is staying at a hotel in the town of Salon (disguised as 'Chambres'), near the Camargue and Crau districts in the south of France. He has long desired to improve the previous speed record of his car by having it driven over a stretch of perfectly straight road in the vicinity.¹ For a long time his attempts are foiled, because of the Mistral and the cattle on the road.

But once, running from the East, into a high-piled, almost Egyptian, sunset, there came a night which it would have been sin to have wasted. It was warm with the breath of summer in advance; moonlit till the shadow of every rounded pebble and pointed cypress windbreak lay solid on that flat-floored waste.

An elderly French gentleman called Voiron asks to be allowed to witness the attempt. We are told that he has been in the colonial service, but has now retired to the family cattle farm in the Crau. The speed record is broken, and Voiron invites Kipling to celebrate the achievement with a dinner, at which he produces a bottle of superlative champagne:

The velvety, perfumed liquor, between fawn and topaz, neither too sweet nor too dry, creamed in the generous glass. But I knew of no wine composed of the whispers of angels' wings, the breath of Eden and the foam and pulse of Youth renewed. So I asked what it might be.

'It is champagne,' he said gravely.

'Then what have I been drinking all my life?'

'If you were lucky, before the War, and paid thirty shillings a bottle, it is possible you may have drunk one of our better-class *tisanes*.'

¹ The straight road actually exists, and can be seen on any good map.

After dinner, Voiron tells the story which forms the substance of the tale. It is about one of his bulls called, or referred to as, Apis. The bull is a born fighter, and it can *think*, i.e. it enters into the psychology of its opponent and plans its strategy accordingly. When it is sent into the bullring at Arles—where neither bull nor men are supposed to be hurt—it first gives a creditable performance according to the rules, but when it is called upon to ‘repeat itself, which no true artist will tolerate’, it rubs the pads off its horns and chases everybody out of the arena.

Using its brilliant fighting technique, it kills three other bulls on the farm and makes a dangerous attack on Voiron himself. After each killing it observes a ‘levitical ritual’ of cleaning its horns. It is subsequently claimed by Voiron’s herdsman, Christophe, in force of some point of local customary law, and sold to Spain. When Voiron and Christophe learn that it is to take part in a *corrida* in a small Catalan town, they go there to see its debut in a real bullfight with the pads off the horns.

The bullfight is clearly the central episode of the story and contains, I believe, clues to its esoteric meaning. It is told at considerable length, but below I give it, as far as space will permit, in Voiron’s words, so that the reader may judge of its significance for himself.

Of the three matadors one ‘kills his bull without distinction’ and that is all we hear of him. The leader is a greatly admired matador called Villamarti, whose popularity, one gathers, is chiefly due to his superb showmanship. The third is called Chisto, ‘a laborious middle-aged professional who had never risen beyond a certain dull competence’. Like the first, anonymous, matador, he is ‘of the background’, and included in the troupe only to serve as a foil for the young and glamorous Villamarti.

When Apis is brought on, he swiftly and with his usual brilliant tactics kills a couple of horses and three men. The account of his killings is drastic, with many grisly details. Villamarti does not even get a chance to get at close quarters with him. After having contemptuously spared his fourth victim, whom he has at his mercy, as too inexperienced to be worthy of his horns, the bull sweeps the arena and forces the whole troupe to escape over the barrier.

Then Chisto goes into the ring, the eldest, and I should have said (but never again will I judge!) the least inspired of all; mediocrity itself, but at heart—and it is the heart that conquers always, my friend—at heart an artist. He descended stiffly into the arena, alone and assured. Apis regarded him, his eyes in his eyes. The man took stance, with his cloak, and called to the bull as to an equal: 'Now, Señor, we will show these honourable caballeros something together. . . .' My dear friend, I wish I could convey to you something of the unaffected bonhomie, the humour, the delicacy, the consideration bordering on respect even, with which Apis, the supreme artist, responded to this invitation.

It was the Master, wearied after a strenuous hour in the atelier, unbuttoned and at ease with some not inexpert but limited disciple. The telepathy was instantaneous between them. And for good reason! Christophe said to me: 'All's well. That Chisto began among the bulls. . . .' There was a little feeling and adjustment, at first, for mutual distances and allowances.

Oh yes! And here occurred a gross impertinence of Villamarti. He had, after an interval, followed Chisto—to retrieve his reputation. My Faith! I can conceive the elder Dumas slamming his door on an intruder precisely as Apis did. He raced Villamarti into the nearest refuge at once. He stamped his feet outside it, and he snorted: 'Go! I am engaged with an artist.' Villamarti went—his reputation left behind for ever.

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Apis returned to Chisto saying: 'Forgive me. I am not always master of my time, but you were about to observe, my dear confrère . . .?' Then the play began.

In the ensuing scene Chisto is inspired (the word is Kipling's) by the bull to greater and greater heights of skill and elegance, while Apis plays up to him with 'the detachment of the true artist who knows he is but the vessel of an emotion whence others, not he, must drink':

My God! His youth returned to that meritorious beef-sticker—the desire, the grace, and the beauty of his early dreams. One could almost see that girl of the past for whom he was rising, rising to these present heights of skill and daring. It was his hour too—a miraculous hour of dawn to gild the sunset.

The bull displays all its varieties of attack and defence to an audience kept so spell-bound that only their breathing is heard, with the assurance of a supreme artist, always taking care 'to spare even a hair on his adversary's skin'. Then, as if they both felt that their drama calls for a détente, they introduce a new note: they 'relax to pure buffoonery', making the audience howl with delight. The arena becomes a stage for a kind of pantomime or ballet.

A bullfight is supposed to end with the death of the bull. But that would not be a fit conclusion of the comedy enacted by Chisto and Apis:

We knew that Apis knew that as he had saved Chisto, so Chisto would save him. Life is sweet to us all; to the artist who lives many lives in one, sweetest. Chisto did not fail him. At the last, when none could laugh any longer, the man threw his cape across the bull's back, his arm round his neck. He flung up a hand at the gate . . . and he cried: 'Gentlemen, open

to me and my honourable little donkey'. They opened — — . . . those gates opened to the man and the bull together, and closed behind them.

This, then, is the outline of the action: outwardly, *The Bull That Thought* is a tale about a bull and a bullfight. It makes a good story like that, and everybody seems to have accepted it as that only. But in a Kipling story from this period, one must be prepared to find another layer of meaning behind the obvious one. Even a cursory reading of the present tale arouses a vague feeling that there is something one ought to read between the lines. Why, for instance, the somewhat shocking details in the account of the bullfight: the 'adorable assassinations', as Voiron calls them, the disembowelments and cracking skulls, etc.? Are they merely part of a realistic description of what happens in a bullring? There is a note of cruelty about them; they seem to indicate a preoccupation with violence for its own sake that had long been absent from Kipling's work. It is difficult to believe that this was really his motive in including them in a story from 1924.

When looking for secondary meanings—those 'overlaid tints and textures' of which he speaks in *Something of Myself* (p. 190)—it is often helpful to go back to the frame that encloses the story, because a study of the frame sometimes discloses parallelisms with themes and symbols also found in the body of the tale.¹ And reading the introduction to *The Bull That Thought*, one is struck by something very curious: *the introduction plays through, point for point, a number of themes that also figure in the description of Chisto's encounter with the bull:*

(1) Kipling has long desired to break the speed record of

¹ Cf. my analysis of *The Prophet and the Country*, Chapter II.

his car and at last sees his hopes fulfilled. Chisto, the unsuccessful bullfighter, finally achieves a long-dreamt-of triumph in the arena.

(2) Kipling is at first frustrated in his attempt by the Mistral, the cold, wintry wind of Provence. Chisto's career has been one of adversity and disappointed hopes—a winter of discontent. The very words in which Kipling describes the sunset that heralds the end of winter and brings with it the soft night that makes *his* triumph possible are echoed in the description of Chisto's hour of glory: 'a miraculous hour of dawn returned to gild the sunset'.

(3) The champagne with which Kipling and Voiron celebrate the former's success is described as an emblem of returning youth; it has 'the foam and pulse of youth renewed'. In the bullring 'his youth returned to that meritorious beef-sticker (Chisto)—the desire, the grace, and the beauty of his early dreams'.

As an overture plays through motifs from the opera, the introduction thus foreshadows three themes from the story itself, all of them connected with Chisto's triumph in the bullring. This is a quite unmistakable indication that Kipling meant the latter episode to be the central one of the story. Incidentally, one notes in addition a little trick characteristic of his later work: the mention of the cattle which, together with the Mistral, foil his first attempts to break the record by obstructing the road, serves to link up the introduction with Voiron's story, which begins with a long disquisition on the cattle of the Crau. In the same way the 'Egyptian' sunset of the introduction prepares the way for the appearance of Apis.

The 'overture' does not tell us what is the esoteric meaning, if any, of the story. But, by showing us the

immense care that Kipling took to load the structure of the tale with semi-concealed parallelisms and cross-references, it warns us that we must keep a lookout for similar effects elsewhere, and that, if there is so much to be gleaned from the first three pages, a close scrutiny of the rest may divulge clues to hidden meanings there.

The first thing that strikes one in the search for clues is the remarkable frequency of the words 'art' and 'artist'. They are sprinkled all over the story after Voiron begins his narrative. In all, they occur fourteen times. The bull is referred to as an artist seven times, Chisto five times (two of them in indirect terms), and Villamarti twice. This insistence on the words 'art' and 'artist' looks as if it were meant to call the reader's attention to something he ought to know in order to grasp the implications of the action. It is, I am convinced, an indication that on the symbolic level *the story is an allegory on art and the artist*. This is supported by the fact that it contains a number of passages which, taken together, constitute a kind of disquisition on the principles of art:

There was in (the bull's strategy) . . . a breadth of technique that comes of reasoned art, and, above all, the passion that arrives after experience.

The detachment of the true artist who knows he is but the vessel of an emotion whence others, not he, must drink.

We desired him (the bull) to repeat himself, which no true artist will tolerate.

But our Arlesians, who are—not so clever as some, demanded an encore.

Life is sweet to us all; to the artist who lives many lives in one, sweetest.

All these five passages, incidentally, might be called a comment on Kipling's own art in his late stories. The bull-

fight scenes with Chisto in the ring are described in terms that suggest a work of art: a drama, a comedy, sometimes a ballet. They are a parable about the mysterious ways of poetic inspiration, exemplified by the way in which the hitherto mediocre artist Chisto is 'inspired'—the word, it will be remembered, is Kipling's—by the bull to attain heights of art hitherto denied him; and it is also a symbol of the way in which the poet responds to the challenge of his subject: that private experience from which he must distil, in the words of Kipling quoted above, 'the passion that arrives after experience' (surely with the emphasis on 'after'), and which must be transformed into 'reasoned art' with 'the detachment of the true artist, who knows he is but the vessel of an emotion whence others, not he, must drink'. (I take this to mean that the original impulse of the artist—the experienced event that was the germ of the work of art—must be turned into something of universal validity, and not remain a vehicle of personal self-pity, complaint or jubilation.)

The bullfight also illustrates what happens when a piece of raw reality is turned into art: a confused scene of violence, suffering and blood (when the inferior artist Villamarti is in charge) is reduced to order, and becomes a source of delight, when Chisto takes over. And finally, the bullfight scene is also an allegory about the artist's fate: his hopes of achieving the perfect work of art, his frustrations, and the triumphs sometimes vouchsafed him, again exemplified by Chisto. That this is Kipling's intention is conclusively proved by the accompanying poem, as it will appear below.

If the above is correct, *The Bull That Thought* has a symbolic structure running parallel with that of the action. Within that structure, Kipling makes a distinction

that is important for the understanding of the symbolism: a distinction between *the work of art*, *the artist*, and *art in the abstract*, the latter being conceived as a kind of Platonic Idea, and as presided over by Powers beyond the reach of human understanding. This is a conception found elsewhere in Kipling, who regarded poetic inspiration as an Uncovenanted Mercy bestowed on the poet in fortunate moments by mysterious Powers.¹

Of *the work of art* the story has two emblems. One is a symbol that is the more effective for its unexpected and arresting character: the killings of the bull, which are pointedly described as works of art in a manner that may strike the reader as a gratuitous glorification of violence until he perceives that they serve a symbolic purpose. The second is the bullring. The elements of a work of art, already present in a confused form in the earlier bullfight scenes with Villamarti in the arena, are here clarified and reduced to artistic order, and the stage ceases to be a shambles and becomes the scene of a highly sophisticated drama. In other words, the bullfight symbolizes the way in which the artist reduces the chaos of reality to an ordered pattern in his work of art.²

The artist is typified both by Villamarti and Chisto, who are both repeatedly designated by the word. But they are two different types of artist. To Villamarti, art is a means to an end that is too tawdry to be sought after by the true worshipper of Apollo, viz. personal glory and cheap popularity and success. He is confronted by his opposite, Chisto, who is the genuine artist, though an

¹ Cf. Dr Tompkins' interpretation of *Wireless* (op. cit., pp. 90 ff.).

² The process by which this is done held an attraction for Kipling: as Dr Tompkins has shown, it is one of the themes of *Wireless*, and it forms the subject of *Proofs of Holy Writ*.

unsuccessful one. He is one of the faithful and humble servitors of Apollo, though the god has never yet permitted him to achieve great art, and though he is only put on the stage as a foil to his young and glamorous rival. But it is Chisto that Apis selects as his partner in the perfect work of art they execute together, while Villamarti is ignominiously pushed aside and humiliated for his presumption and his disloyalty to art, as Apollo punished Marsyas.

And what, then, does the bull stand for? The symbolism would be more transparent—and perhaps too obvious for Kipling's purpose—if Apis had simply been assigned the third place in the triad art/work of art/artist, and been made the representative simply and solely of *Art*. But it is not quite so simple as that. Apis does represent the principle of art—one may even say the God of Art—in the bullfight scenes, but he is also repeatedly referred to as an artist. In fact, up to the bullfight, that is the only symbolic implication one can read into the account of his exploits. But in the Spanish arena he obviously comes to stand for something more momentous: he has become the dispenser of inspiration, and it is he who executes justice on the spurious artist and grants to the genuine one, Chisto, his one hour of artistic triumph after a life of disappointed endeavour: the bullring has become the scene of a Moment of Truth in a different sense from the usual one. In this scene the bull is transformed into an embodiment of Art itself. He is the very God of Art, come to glorify his true servant and punish his false one. After all, the Bull has been an avatar of gods in many religions (including Mithraism, to which there are many allusions in Kipling, one of them in the poem accompanying this story). And he is called Apis, the name of a god. Should

one wonder at his double role of artist and the personification of Art itself, it is well to remember that Apollo was not only the God of Song, but also a singer.

It will be seen from the above that the bull symbol is a complex one. It is even more complex than has as yet appeared: in this story Kipling anticipates T. S. Eliot's practice of making some symbols stand for several referents, and, in addition to representing Art and the artist, Apis also symbolizes a third concept, *the genius of France*. To use a fighting bull in this way was a fairly obvious thing to do at a time when one of the things 'the genius of France' would immediately suggest was the Battle of the Marne, the defence of Verdun, etc.

A symbol that has several referents is more artistically satisfactory if these are not too disparate, but connected in some way. In fact, 'the genius of France' is connected with the various aspects of Art designated by the bull symbol in that it also evokes what to most readers will be the greatest achievement of France, her contribution to arts and letters.

Of the two things Apis stands for—Art and the French spirit—the former must be intended as the most important meaning of the symbol, for that meaning occurs in the crucial scene of the story. The indications of the second symbolic meaning are found in less conspicuous places, but they are nevertheless quite unmistakable. In addition to what is conveyed by the recurring descriptions of the bull's fighting qualities, we find the following passages: 'This Foch among bulls.' 'He reduced the episode to its lowest element, as could only a bull of Gaul.' Chisto is sent into the arena by 'Fate—the genius of France, if you like'. And finally: why is Apis French at all, and not a Spanish bull? To insist that he is French must have been

of importance to Kipling, for the point involves him in a good deal of trouble in explaining how he ever got to Spain, involving a fairly long disquisition on obscure local law.

But what clinches the matter is the speech with which Voiron concludes his account of the final scene in the bull-ring, where Chisto and the bull leave the arena together, accompanied by the frantic applause of the audience. As the final passage of the story, it must be meant to underline one of its most important motifs: 'Christophe and I, we were weeping together like children of the same Mother. Shall we drink to Her?' The 'Mother' is of course France.

It remains to examine two further points, of subsidiary importance for the structure of the tale, but, if my interpretation is correct, of very great interest as a unique contribution to our knowledge of the writer: in *The Bull That Thought* Kipling included the equivalent of a cryptogram that reveals the feelings with which he looked back on his literary career, and his attitude to those stories of his old age that contemporary criticism failed to appreciate, and even to understand.

Readers of Kipling will know that, though the 'I' of his stories is always ostensibly himself, it is really a *persona* introduced as a literary device for the purposes of the tale, and that it is not meant as a vehicle of confidences about the writer's personality. This holds good of all the stories supposed to be told by himself, except those whose theme is the Revelation of Mirth, where he does definitely tell us something about his innermost feelings.

There are indications that in *The Bull That Thought* he wished to tell more about himself—perhaps to a posterity

that would find him worthy of closer study than his own time—though, with his habitual reticence where his private life was concerned, he embodied it in a message that would have to be 'decoded' before it could be understood. One must bear in mind that at the time of writing, Kipling's literary reputation was under a cloud, that he had practically been dropped by the more intellectual critics, and that his late stories, of which he must have been justly proud, were regarded as incomprehensible, and must have bewildered and disappointed his old public, which wanted a repetition of the kind of tale that had gained him his popularity. In other words, the picture of the disappointed artist Chisto in the story to some extent describes his own situation, and so does the refusal of the bull 'to repeat himself, which no true artist will tolerate'.

In fact, the way in which the Chisto motif is handled does suggest that Kipling identifies himself with the middle-aged bullfighter who is overshadowed by a younger and more popular rival, and that Chisto's triumph over adversity and over his meretricious rival is something that Kipling dreamed of for himself. This is borne out by his remarks on Chisto's and Apis's 'art'¹ which are throughout valid for Kipling's own, and also by the fact that in the introduction the experiences of his *persona* are described in terms that correspond, point for point, to those of Chisto.²

So far, we are as yet in the realm of general impressions, which might be subjective, and which must be substantiated from the text to carry full conviction. There are, however, a number of passages that support the general impression, and whose cumulative effect amounts to something like positive proof that Kipling is here trying

¹ See above, p. 60.

² Cf. above, pp. 58-9.

to tell us, in his usual cryptic language, something about his own situation, his pride in the stories of his late period, and his reaction to their unfavourable reception.

First, there are the two passages referred to above in another connection about the refusal of the artist to repeat himself. It is characteristic of Kipling that he rarely uses the same, or what is virtually the same, phrase twice in close succession, except as a technical device to call the reader's attention to it. In this story there are two passages fairly close to each other that do repeat the same idea similarly phrased. Voiron says of Apis that 'we desired him to repeat himself, which no true artist will tolerate'. And 'our Arlesians, who are—not so clever as some—demanded an encore', at which Apis is so incensed that he makes a murderous attack on the men in the arena. Seeing that whenever Kipling elsewhere in the story propounds an idea about the nature of Art it is applicable to his own, one wonders if this repetition is really fortuitous, or whether it might not rather be meant as a hint at something about the writer himself. After all, one of the most remarkable things about Kipling's literary career is the obstinacy with which he refused to repeat himself, and especially the way in which late in life he turned, as it were, on his old public and sacrificed his popularity by adopting a new and difficult technique, instead of giving his readers what they expected of him, on the principle enunciated in *Something of Myself*: 'As soon as you find you can do anything, do something you can't.'¹

Early in the story there is another of the repetitions at which the experienced Kipling reader cocks an ear. Why does Voiron say that *before the war* (my italics) the best champagne his guest was likely to get was 'one of our

¹ Op. cit., p. 190.

better-class tisanes' (meaning an infusion of camomile, or the like)?—it will be remembered that the champagne served a symbolic purpose, that it was introduced to celebrate the achievement of a long-desired end, and that it stood for the return of youth. And why does Kipling remark a page further on, '*After the War* everything is possible', while a little later Voiron says apropos of nothing: 'It was *after the War* that this happened'?

This threefold repetition of a phrase that, on each occasion it is used, contributes nothing to the narrative and is practically devoid of meaning looks like one of Kipling's verbal pointers meant to direct the reader's mind towards certain associations, in this case, towards the first World War (which was also indirectly brought in by Apis standing for the spirit of France). I believe that the threefold use of the War as a point of reference may perhaps be meant to suggest that, as it was the challenge of the fighting bull that permitted the middle-aged matador to achieve his triumph—the perfect work of art—so it was the challenge of the War that inspired Kipling, or that he was confident would inspire him, to do his best work: those stories of the War in which, like Chisto, he reduced a welter of suffering and death to the orderly cosmos of great art.¹

¹ As the dates of the War stories in question are relevant for the above, I give the dates of publication (which do not, of course, necessarily indicate the dates of composition). The collection *A Diversity of Creatures* (1917) contains two War stories: *Swept and Garnished* and *Mary Postgate*. Then follows the collection *Debits and Credits* (1926). It contains the following War stories: *Sea Constables* (1915), *In the Interests of the Brethren* (1918), *A Madonna of the Trenches* (September 1924), *The Janeites* (May 1924), and *A Friend of the Family* (July 1924).

Then comes *The Bull That Thought* (December 1924), and after

That he should have felt this way when he wrote *The Bull That Thought* is made the more probable by the fact that in the year in which he published that story he really seems to have received a new access of inspiration. It is the eighth story to be published in 1924, while in 1920, 1921 and 1922 he had not brought out a single one, and only one in 1923. (This, incidentally, would seem to add a further touch of symbolic meaning to the introduction, which we have seen was so densely filled with significant passages. I refer to the lines about the wintry wind that had prevented Kipling from getting his car out on the straight road in order to improve its speed record.)

Thus the bullring, which we have already seen was an emblem of the work of art, assumes a further symbolic significance in also standing for the War. And this would account for the demonstrative display of shocking details—the disembowelments, the broken-legged and half paralysed horse, and the crack of the man's skull as it is smashed against the barrier. It is true that violence had an attraction for Kipling, and that there are similar descriptions in his Indian battle scenes, but that sort of thing belongs in his early stories and does not come out in his late ones. In fact, to find a detailed description of a bullfight in a Kipling story from 1924 at all is a little surprising, except on the assumption that it serves a symbolic purpose.

But the final, and I think conclusive, evidence that the story is meant to tell us something about Kipling's own art, and of his disappointment at the failure of his

that *On the Gate* (January 1926) and *The Gardener* (April 1926; first begun May 1925). But the stories inspired by the War may not be confined to those actually dealing with the War.

contemporaries to recognize the merits of his late tales, is provided by the accompanying poem *Alnaschar and the Oxen*, which contains a quite unmistakable clue. The poems accompanying Kipling's tales otherwise always deal with some theme related to that of the story, or the same theme as the story, in such a way as to present it from a new angle. In this case, it does not appear to do so, and this in itself is so strange that it invites closer scrutiny. Ostensibly the poem is only a loving description of the writer's herd of Sussex cattle. But one of the stanzas runs as follows:

Here is colour, form and substance! I will put it to the proof
 And, next season, in my lodges shall be born
 Some very Bull of Mithras, flawless from his agate hoof
 To his even-branching, ivory, dusk-tipped horn.
 He shall mate with block-square virgins—kings shall seek his
 like in vain,
 While I multiply his stock a thousandfold,
 Till an hungry world extol me, builder of a lofty strain
 That turns one standard ton at two years old.

Though the stanza is disguised as a mere description of the desired marvellous bull, two phrases show that this is not all there is to it: 'Here is colour, form and substance' is much more appropriate to a work of art than to a herd of cattle; and that 'an hungry world shall extol' the breeder of the bull as 'the builder of a lofty strain' makes it certain that this is what the lines are meant to convey. In other words, Kipling is here speaking of his desire to achieve a great work of art.¹

¹ Something like this is also intimated by the titles of his last two collections: *Debits and Credits* suggests a stock-taking of his work, where the 'credits' are presumably the results obtained by his late technique. In *Limits and Renewals*, 'renewals' must be meant to indicate new departures in his art.

And the name Alnaschar in the title of the poem tells us even more. It is the clue to an unexpected confession hidden in the text. Alnaschar is a beggar in *The Arabian Nights*. The story, which is called *The Barber's Fifth Brother*, has nothing whatever to do with oxen. The first part of it, which is the one to which the title of Kipling's poem refers, tells how Alnaschar inherits a hundred pieces of silver. This he invests in a basket of glassware, and then begins to dream of the riches he expects to obtain by further financial speculations: he will become so rich that the Grand Vizier offers him his daughter in marriage. In his excess of pride he kicks her away from him on their wedding night, and in so doing he overturns his basket and shatters the glassware.

The introduction of the Arabian beggar and his disastrous dream into a poem about Sussex cattle is so odd that it must have a symbolic significance, and the only significance that can be read into it is this: as has been shown above, the stanza about the wondrous bull he aspires to breed must mean that Kipling dreams of producing a masterpiece that the world will marvel at. But in trying to do so he shatters the glass which, like Alnaschar's, had constituted his hoard of treasure. And what else could this mean than that, in attempting to attain new heights with the kind of story he now set out to write, he forfeited his popularity and his literary prestige? That the lost treasure is glass is surely significant. He had by now come to regard his discarded story form as something inferior—as tinkling glass, bright to look at, but brittle. What he wanted to work in now was a nobler and more durable substance.

Alnaschar and the Oxen—which, like all Kipling's accompanying poems, is then after all meant to throw light

on the story itself—is thus seen to be a sardonic comment on the reward the world accorded him for his new achievement. For of course he knew the value of his late stories himself. There was in his persistence in using a medium which his own time could not understand and did not appreciate at its true worth, an element of defiance, and a confidence that later ages would know better: Chisto going down into the arena ‘alone and assured’, to confront Apis, who is also the God of Art, and to receive from the God the reward of his integrity, is also Kipling himself.

CHAPTER V

‘TEEM’

The Bull That Thought is not the only one of Kipling's stories that contains hidden autobiographical elements and references to his art. The same is the case in a dog story, of all places: ‘Teem’. *A Treasure-Hunter*.¹ In this tale they are in fact more conspicuous than in *The Bull That Thought*, but they have attracted little attention, possibly because ‘Teem’ is not a particularly good story. Its appeal is more to readers who are interested in dogs than to students of literary technique, and it is not one that critics are likely to take much notice of. It has none of the elaborate artistry of *The Bull That Thought*, and some of its symbolism is of a much more primitive kind: certain characters can be ‘translated’ into persons who played a part in Kipling's life, while the dog, Teem, who is the protagonist, can be ‘translated’ into certain aspects of his own personality, and what happens to Teem into events of his own literary career. Curiously enough, though the tale, on the symbolic level, is largely about his experiments in new techniques, it is not itself in his late manner. The only thing it has in common with the latter is the presence of veiled meanings; few of the stylistic devices characteristic of his late manner are in evidence.

It has, however, not quite escaped critical examination:

¹ First published in *The Strand Magazine*, January 1935, and included in the collection *Thy Servant a Dog*.

it is the subject of a paper by J. C. Griffin¹ that deserves more attention than it has apparently received.²

Griffin interprets practically every detail of the story as an allusion to Kipling's life and literary career. To enable readers who have not got 'Teem' at hand to judge for themselves how far his interpretation, as well as my own, which differs from his on a good many points, can stand up to a critical examination, it will again be necessary to give a synopsis:

The story is told in the first person by Teem himself. The language has a discreet touch of Gallicism, as if it was a too literal translation, in keeping with the dog's French origins. This gives scope for a certain amount of *panache* in Teem's references to his merits, and emphasizes a point Kipling is at pains to bring out: that Teem's troubles are those of a newcomer in a strange country, where he is not understood.³

Born near Cahors in France, Teem is descended from ancestors who are 'a race built up from remote times on the Gifted of various strains'. He is short of stature, and twice referred to as a dwarf. His parents are truffle-hunters, and he is himself endowed with an outstanding talent for scenting out truffles, which is greatly appreciated in his own country.

¹ 'Concerning "Teem"', *The Kipling Journal*, September 1937, pp. 75-90.

² I am indebted to Dr Tompkins for calling my attention to the autobiographical implications of the story and to Griffin's paper, as well as for the following specific points: that the dog is trying to get out of the walled park, and not into it; that the Ferret and the Goose may not be moneylenders; and that the rabbits that Teem is advised to catch may have a symbolical significance.

³ The name Teem is one of these Gallicisms. It reflects an English idea of the French pronunciation of Tim.

We hear of his ‘revered Father’ and his ‘adored Mother’: ‘From my Father I inherited my nose, and, perhaps, a touch of genius. From my Mother a practical philosophy without which even Genius is but a bird on the wing’. We are also told of his master, Pierre, for whom he does not care, of his two companions, Pluton and Dis, and of his mentor, le Vicomte, a powerfully built dog who drives bulls.

Teem’s genius for finding truffles is the dominant motif of the story, and this is further driven home by the subtitle: ‘A Treasure-Hunter’. It is consistently referred to as his ‘Art’, with a capital A, and the word ‘Art’ and ‘Artist’ occur about a dozen times.

Teem is sold to an Englishman and taken to England. His new owner is killed, or stunned, in a car accident as he drives through a country that must be the Weald of Sussex, and Teem is adopted by an old charcoal-burner, to whom he becomes greatly devoted. The latter has a daughter, who appears to be dying from tuberculosis. This is not his only trouble: two repulsive persons from the neighbouring town, whom Teem calls the Ferret and the Goose, have some kind of claim on him which they threaten to enforce. (This, I take it, may be what he wants to convey—the matter is of course beyond the dog’s understanding. It is also possible that they are a couple of local busybodies who want the girl removed to a sanatorium.)

Teem is anxious to help his master, and believes he can do so by finding truffles for him, knowing that a high price is paid for them in the country he came from. The countryside in Sussex is however different from that of Cahors, and this ‘demanded changes and adjustments of his technique’, but he overcomes this difficulty and brings

home a hoard of particularly fine truffles. To his surprise he finds that neither his master nor the girl know that they are edible. They think he wants to play with them, and throw them for him to fetch, 'as though they had been stones and I a puppy!'

Near the cottage of Teem's master there is a manor house in a park, enclosed by a wall. A somewhat puzzling scene describes how the dog tries to get out of this park, becoming more and more frantic as he finds that the wall is too high for him to jump, and tearing round and round it in a vain attempt to find a gap. The passage in question has little connection with the rest of the action, and bears all the marks of a symbolic device, whatever the symbolism stands for.

Teem is surprised to find that his 'adopted Aunt', the sheepdog, can jump walls without any difficulty. The latter tells him that as long as he has not got a 'Collar of Office' (a dog-licence) he is an outsider. His master ultimately buys him a licence, because he fears that the Ferret and the Goose may otherwise make trouble for him.

Teem is dismayed that his talents are not recognized, and that he cannot use them for the benefit of his beloved master, but at last a fairy godmother appears in the shape of the lady of the enclosed manor. She is referred to as the Born One, 'descended from champion strains', and she appreciates the truffles that Teem brings her on the advice of his 'Aunt', the sheepdog. She walks over to the charcoal-burner to thank him, and while she is there the Ferret and the Goose turn up to put pressure on him again. It is an encounter between the aristocrat and the vulgarian:

Our Born One descended upon them softly as a mist through which shine the stars, and greeted them in the voice

of a dove out of summer foliage. I held me still. She needed no aid, that one! They grew louder and more loud; she increasingly more suave. . . .

Then—she abolished them! . . . And then—and then—those insupportable offspring of a jumped-up *gentilhomme* were transformed into amiable and impressed members of their proper class, giving ground slowly at first, but finally evaporating—yes, evaporating—like bad smells—in the direction of the world whence they had intruded.

Teem has at long last found the recognition of his Art that he pined for. The story leaves the charcoal-burner's daughter on her way to recovery after the fear of their two persecutors has been taken off her mind. Teem is happy in his new country, though in dreams he sometimes revisits 'his lost world', and meets again his companions Pluton and Dis.

As my own interpretation differs from Griffin's on many points, including nearly all the crucial ones, it will be necessary to go into the latter in some detail.

Griffin shows that the passages dealing with Teem's early life are translatable point for point into autobiography. The account of the dog's descent and stature is meant to apply to Kipling himself. Teem's parents are Kipling's father and mother, and his playmates Pluton and Dis are his schoolboy companions, Dunsterville and Beresford (Stalky and M'Turk in *Stalky and Co.*). The big bull-driving dog called le Vicomte is Kipling's admired headmaster Cormell Price. This is not only plausible but convincing, except perhaps for the identification of le Vicomte with Cormell Price. (Griffin thinks that the passage where Teem wishes that he too could be a driver of bulls 'probably means that he (Kipling) once told Cormell Price in fun that he would become a school-

master'.) I find it hard to believe that Kipling ever expressed such a wish, even in fun. Le Vicomte, it seems to me, might stand for any man of action he had met and admired, most likely one of the Anglo-Indians he knew while he was in India. The aristocratic name might even narrow it down to Lord Dufferin, the Viceroy, who befriended the young writer. (Cf. *Something of Myself*, p. 94.)

The remaining points of Griffin's interpretation are: the charcoal-burner is 'the England that Kipling loved'. His daughter stands for the colonial Empire. That in the end she gets 'a wooden-roofed house of her own—open on one side and capable of being turned round against winds by His (her father's) strong one hand', signifies colonial self-government. The Ferret and the Goose are the detested Radicals. The sheepdog is 'a compound of such Imperialists as Chamberlain, Rhodes, Milner and others'. The wall enclosing the park is the resistance which Kipling's Imperialism met with, while the lady of the manor stands for 'those discerning imperialists . . . who recognized and encouraged Rudyard Kipling's efforts for the Empire'. The 'Chain of Office' signifies recognition of his services to the cause of Imperialism.

Griffin's article commands respect. Written at a time when few, if any, readers were aware of Kipling's use of symbolic effects, it is pioneer work, and some of his conclusions, notably his identifications of Teem's parents and early friends, carry conviction. Many of them, however, especially those mentioned in the preceding paragraph, are very difficult to accept, for reasons that will appear below.¹ Thus the charcoal-burner's tuberculous daughter

¹ The one exception seems to me to be the interpretation of Teem's new master as a symbol of the English common people. This is supported by the passage which describes the dog's fears that he might fall

seems a very unlikely symbol for the colonies, and however much Kipling detested Radicals, whom he usually represented as sophisticated and depraved highbrows, he can hardly have thought that they could be fittingly symbolized by a couple of lower middle class money-lenders. (This objection would, of course, not apply if they are meant to be some kind of social workers: Kipling certainly disliked anything in the nature of what afterwards came to be called the Welfare State.)

The allusions to Kipling's parents and friends show conclusively that this is meant to be an autobiographical story, but in themselves they reveal nothing of particular importance; they are merely a kind of private joke. What the story is really about, on the symbolic level, is obviously to be looked for in the many passages dealing with Teem's 'Art': that of truffle-finding. These must be the keys to its hidden meaning.

The truffles that Teem finds in the Sussex Weald cannot very well stand for Kipling's Imperialist writings, nor the wall for the resistance they met. Nor can the lady of the manor represent those who appreciated these writings. For one thing, Kipling no longer regarded his Imperialist propaganda as his principal life-work by the time he wrote this story, and had, in fact, lost most of the interest he once took in the subject. For another, the story markedly stresses the new techniques that Teem had to evolve in order to do justice to his genius in his new country: Kipling's Imperialist writings involve no break with his earlier techniques. And finally, the insistence on the point that Teem's truffle-finding is an *Art*

into one of the river pits that Teem knew in his puppyhood—no doubt an allusion to Kipling's fears for England in a world of enemies and on the way to social changes that he distrusted.

would seem to be incompatible with interpretations in terms of Kipling's Imperialism.

In the light of *The Bull That Thought*, and of the constant references to Teem's gift as an Art, it seems clear that the dog's altered technique must symbolize Kipling's experiments in short story writing, which his old public did not understand, and which we know from the *Alnaschar* poem¹ that he regarded as having caused him to forfeit his former prestige.

I think it is a mistake to treat the story as if it were all on one level. In addition to the surface level—a tale about the adventures of a dog—it has, like most of the stories of Kipling's late years, at least two esoteric strands: one is the autobiographical element, and the other is a tribute to the feudal way of life. It is a curious feature of Kipling's picture of the English scene after he came back from America and settled in Sussex that he makes out the quintessence of England to be still feudal. (Compare *An Habitation Enforced*, the general background of the Puck stories, the Hobden motif, etc.) It is as if only the relics of feudalism counted, and the Midlands, the East End, industrialism, trade unions, etc. had no real existence. For it must be borne in mind that these descriptions are not intended to give a picture of a particular region only, but of what he then considered the essential England.

In 'Teem', it seems to me, the feudal theme is emphasized in a way that cannot very well be mistaken once one has noticed it. There is the idealized description of the lady of the manor, the Born One, contrasted with the petit-bourgeois in the persons of the Ferret and the Goose. It is she that assumes the part of a benevolent Providence as regards the charcoal-burner (who seems to be

¹ See p. 70 ff.

some kind of retainer) and saves him and his daughter from the menace of evil forces. Kipling is surely making a point in his account of the meeting of the peasant and the Born One after Teem has brought her the truffles: 'He too was uncovered, stood beautifully erect and as a peasant of race should bear himself when He and His are not being tortured by Ferrets and Geese.' He and the Born One understand and respect each other, because they both have their place in the feudal scheme. He is even given a trait which often occurs in Kipling's descriptions of feudal peasant types: that, though he is an honourable man, he regards a little poaching on the side as a lawful perquisite.

So much for the synopsis and for the assessment of Griffin's interpretation. What then is one to make of all this?

The *leitmotif* of the story is Teem's gift for finding truffles. That these are a symbol of Art, and that Kipling had his own literary career in mind when he wrote the tale, will, I think, appear unmistakably from three things: (1) the way in which this gift is systematically referred to as his 'Art' and himself as an 'Artist'; (2) the general action, which primarily describes how somebody who knows himself to be an artist first finds his gifts unappreciated and in the end meets with recognition; and (3) some passages which deal more specifically with Teem's 'Art':

I explained that I was a specialist in the discovery of delicacies which the genius of my ancestors had revealed since the First Person first scratched the first dirt.

My Art he (Teem's English master) could by no means comprehend. For naturally, I followed my Art as every Artist

must, even when he is misunderstood. If not, he comes to preoccupy himself mournfully with his proper fleas.

'But, ma Tante,' I cried, 'I have the secret of an Art beyond all others.' 'That is not understood in these parts,' she replied. 'You have told me of it many times, but I do not believe. What a pity it is not rabbits! You are small enough to creep down their burrows. But these precious things of yours underground which no one but you can find—it is absurd.'

'Listen, ma Tante!' I all but howled. 'The world I came from was stuffed with things underground which all Persons desired. This world here is also rich in them, but I—I alone—can bring them to light!'

For the reasons given above, the passage where Teem frantically circles the wall of the park cannot very well refer to his efforts in the cause of Imperialism. From *The Bull That Thought* it seems fairly clear that by the time he wrote '*Teem*' it was the lack of interest in his new technique, and not the way the public received his Imperialistic ideas, that he regarded as the greatest disappointment of his literary career. It is therefore much more likely that the symbol is connected with the former.

Altogether, this is the most puzzling episode of the tale. One thing that contributes to its apparent obscurity is that it is never said explicitly whether Teem is trying to get into the park or out of it, and most readers would probably think, as I did myself at one time, that the former was the case. But he is trying to get out of it; his master's cottage and the whole scene of his first adventures in Sussex are enclosed by the wall. This tallies better with the frenzy of his efforts, and it is clinched by the passing mention of the porter's lodge, which must surely be inside the gates.

The passage in question is led up to by another, in

which Teem complains to his 'Aunt', the sheepdog, about his misfortune in not being allowed to practise his 'Art' in this country, where nobody seems to appreciate it as people did in 'his old world'. The sheepdog replies tartly: 'Here is not there. It should have been rabbits'—in other words Teem must resign himself to conditions in England, where such Art as his is not respected, and where praise is reserved for those who follow professions whose status is traditionally recognized. Teem then reflects: 'Whither, then, should I go?—There remained only my lost world where Persons knew the value of truffles and of Those of Us who could find them. I would seek that world!'

Immediately after follows his attempt to force the wall. It is thus made quite clear that the country outside the enclosed park is his 'old world', and that this world is the place where his art was recognized. As for the symbolic meaning of his 'old world' there are two possibilities: it might be India, where Kipling achieved his first literary triumphs, or—as I think more likely—it might be Youth, the time of his life when he had not yet met with sorrow and adversity. This would fit in with the epithet 'lost', and also with the passage at the end of the story, where Teem revisits 'his lost world' in dreams, and again meets the companions of his youth.

In any case, Teem's vain attempts to get out of the park must symbolize the writer's dream of escape from those trammels of everyday middle-aged life that make it difficult for the artist to devote himself wholly to his calling. But this also involves another meaning of the symbol, for the means by which Kipling himself sought to escape from an art form which he by now regarded as done with, but which his public continued to demand from him, was his new short story technique, by which, as

we know from *The Bull That Thought* and *Alnaschar and the Oxen*, he at one time expected to win renewed fame. 'Teem' thus has two symbols for his late manner, the other being the way in which the dog successfully adapts his old truffle-finding technique to the conditions of his new environment. And the rabbits which the sheepdog advises him to catch, instead of wasting his time hunting for truffles, stand for his older type of story, for which he could always count on popular approval.

The lady of the manor has the same function in this story as Apis had in the *corrida* scenes of *The Bull That Thought*: she is the *dea ex machina* who rewards the Artist that remains true to his Art, by turning his frustrations into success—a wish dream of what Kipling hoped would happen to himself.

As nearly everything in the story seems to have some kind of symbolic function, it remains to explain the passage where the Sussex sheepdog jumps walls with ease, while Teem is unable to get across them. This might perhaps be a reference to those writers born and bred in England who found it easier to find an ear for their work among the critics than the newcomer Kipling.

The scene where Teem's new masters fail to appreciate the truffles he brings them, and throw them for him to play with, as if he were a puppy, no doubt signifies the mere entertainment value that even Kipling's most devoted public was apt to ascribe to his work.

I think there is a further autobiographical theme. Teem is contrasted with two other dogs: the mentor of his puppyhood in France, le Vicomte, and the Sussex dog whom he calls his Aunt. While his own genius for finding truffles is devoted to providing 'Persons' with delicacies, his two friends use their gifts for more practical and

matter-of-fact ends: le Vicomte is a bull-driver and the ‘Aunt’ a sheepdog. They represent ‘the doers’, the organizers and rulers. Their command of the techniques of their crafts amounts to an Art too, in its own way. Teem admires them and envies them for their skills.

His strength, his audacity, overwhelmed me. He, on his side, was frankly bewildered by my attainments. ‘But, how—*how*, little one, is it done, your business?’ I could not convey to him, nor he to me, the mystery of our several Arts . . .

‘And I,’ I cried (my second teeth were just pushing), ‘I will be a Driver of Bulls.’

‘Little one,’ he responded with infinite tenderness, ‘here is one thing for us both to remember. Outside his Art, an Artist must never dream.’

Taken by itself, this piece of advice may look somewhat cryptic, but when seen in its context it clearly means nothing more mysterious than that an Artist must be content with his own Art, and not hanker after that of others. The passage looks like another personal confession: Kipling’s youthful admiration for ‘the doers’, which at one time made him uneasy about his own profession, as having too much to do with words and too little with action.¹

The theme of the Collar of Office, which Teem only acquires after some time of waiting, must refer to some kind of recognized status, and perhaps to difficulties that Kipling experienced in being acknowledged by his countrymen as one of themselves when he left America and settled in Sussex.

As to the theme of the sick girl, I doubt if it is meant to have any autobiographical significance. It belongs, I believe, with the feudal elements of the story: she is introduced in order to show the benevolence of the feudal

¹ Cf. p. 40.

order, as exemplified by the Born One. The latter not only disposes of the charcoal-burner's troubles by ridding him of his two tormentors, but also brings his daughter back to health by restoring her peace of mind, and also, it appears, by sending a doctor to look after her.

If the account of Teem's early life is meant to be consistently autobiographical—and it looks as if it is—his first master, whom he does not care for, might be Kipling's first employer, Stephen Wheeler, the editor of *The Civil and Military Gazette* at Lahore. When Kipling names Teem's two youthful companions after the King of the Underworld (Pluton and Dis) he probably only intends to convey that Stalky and M'Turk were a couple of young devils, however much one might be tempted to connect it with the name Pluto of his 'pet toad' in that very curious passage in *Something of Myself* where 'the night got into his head'.¹

¹ Cf. above, p. 1 ff.

CHAPTER VI

KIPLING'S LATE MANNER

THE TERM 'Kipling's late manner' needs a little clarification. It is a short story technique towards which he had been moving for some time. He began by writing almost completely 'straight' stories, as in *Plain Tales* (most of them dating from 1886 and 1887). But already *The Man Who Would be King* (1888) shows an entirely different manner, and is in its turn quite unlike *My Sunday at Home*, published seven years later.

About the time of World War I his late manner came near to replacing his earlier techniques. But he did not invent it as late as that. It occurs sporadically much earlier. He seems to have evolved it about 1904. *They* and *Mrs Bathurst*, which were published in that year, are fairly typical examples of it, and in the latter it is carried to such extremes that the story has until now been regarded as incomprehensible. It is used in the next chapter as an illustration of the technique in question, because it exhibits most of the characteristics of his new short story form, and also because I believe it is not as inexplicable as it is commonly supposed to be, and that it is in fact possible to give a tolerably convincing interpretation of it.

The technique of some of the stories in *Rewards and Fairies* (1910) is also akin to that of his late manner, and on these we have a comment by himself—in

Something of Myself (p. 190 ff.), of which more will be said later.¹

That a tale is enigmatic, or that it contains symbolic elements, does not, of course, mean that it necessarily belongs together with those in his late manner. There are two stories earlier than 1904 that are symbolic and somewhat obscure, but which do not. One is *The Children of the Zodiac* (1891). This is the earliest story that is at all difficult to understand, but in structure it is a fairly simple allegory. When readers found it difficult, it was partly because they were not used to finding that sort of thing in Kipling, and also, perhaps, because the allegory is not very clearly worked out.²

The other is *The Bridge Builders* (1893), which does present some difficulty, partly owing to some of the symbolical passages—the bridge is an emblem of the impact of European civilization on India—and partly to the obscurity of another symbolic theme: the fever dream in which Findlayson, the bridge builder, believes that the animals on the river island on which he spends the night are the Indian gods.

The technical devices characteristic of Kipling's late manner are nearly always clues to hidden meanings. Only in very few cases are they used solely to produce an effect of elegance or wit. Some examples of this are found in *On the Gate*, one of them in the scene where Death chats for a moment with the porter of the Normal Civil Death Office. The passage has an easy wit of a kind not often found in Kipling's stories: a stylized, friendly talk

¹ Other comments by Kipling on his technique are found in *Something of Myself*, p. 207 ff., and in his introduction to the *Outward Bound* edition.

² See Chapter III.

between an elderly head of a department and a faithful subordinate. The porter is called Sergeant Fell, as neat a piece of jugglery with *Hamlet*, V, 2, 347: 'this fell sergeant, death, is strict in his arrest', as anyone could wish for.

Below, an attempt is made to analyse the stylistic effects peculiar to Kipling's late manner. Such a point-for-point analysis of a large number of elements makes dull reading, and should be kept as short as possible. On the other hand, it would be even duller, and less informative, if it did not include some illustrations. Some of the points are, however, difficult to illustrate, because the effect of the devices in question depends on the context. It is easier to see this effect in a detailed analysis of individual stories.¹

The numbering of the stylistic devices has a somewhat repellent air of pedantry, but it has been adopted because it makes for more clarity in a survey that may otherwise be confusing by its length and the many features it attempts to cover.

1. The stories in Kipling's late manner are completely different from those he wrote in the 1880's and 1890's, and on which his fame and popularity originally rested, and even more from the type that came to predominate in the English short story at the time when his last collections—*A Diversity of Creatures*, *Debts and Credits*, and *Limits and Renewals*—were published. At that time, the intellectual short story became an attempt to evoke a mood or to catch a moment of time, and show the implications of that moment for one or more characters, rather than to tell a story.

The technique of Kipling's late manner is the reverse of this: the tales do tell a story; they have much more action, and often a greater number of fully developed

¹ See Chapters II, IV, V and VII.

characters, than the typical product of the genre during the post-war years. They tend, in fact, to become a kind of greatly concentrated novel, usually dealing with a fairly long period in the lives of one or more characters, and with their mutual interactions. If the tale covers a short span of time, events in their earlier lives are either directly narrated or, more frequently, they can be gathered from hints in the text. This involves a high degree of concentration if the story is to be of his usual length, i.e. some 15-20 pages, and this concentration is obviously regarded by the writer as desirable in itself.

Many examples of this might be cited, among them one of Kipling's most impressive achievements, *The Gardener*. But an even better example is *The Eye of Allah*, another fine story of his old age. A brief synopsis of this tale may be useful, as an illustration of Kipling's concentrated short story form, and also because this tale is drawn on below to exemplify other typical effects.

The scene is an English monastery at the close of the middle ages. Passages scattered all over the story build up a picture of the life of its inmates, which suggests the multifarious and orderly activities of a ship. Some of the monks are described, and three of them come into focus: John, the artist who illuminates the manuscripts of the scriptorium, whose Spanish-Jewish mistress dies in child-bed after having given birth to a still-born child; Thomas, who is dismayed by the evil shapes he sees in his dreams, until he learns from the microscope that John brings back from Spain that they are part of God's creation; and Abbot Stephen, who has his own tragedy: he knows that his 'lady', Anne of Norton, is dying of cancer.

This leads up to the crucial episode of the story: the abbot's dinner party, where he shows his guests John's

microscope. The point here is the reactions of four different types of men to the momentous possibilities of the new invention. To John, the artist, it is merely a means to obtain new artistic effects by using the magnified projections of animalculae as models for the devils with which he decorates his manuscripts. To the physician, Roger of Salerno, and the philosopher, Roger Bacon, it is a means to explore nature, and they are eager to exploit it as a tool of science. But to Abbot Stephen, who represents the statesman in this company, it is something else: the microscope, and the empirical science it stands for, are a solvent that will destroy the mediaeval order which the monastery embodies. It is a discovery that has come before its time, and though he realizes that it may in time save the lives of sufferers like his own mistress, he shatters it with the hilt of a dagger.

The Eye of Allah is permeated with symbolic meanings and recurrent similes and themes. These are effects that will be dealt with below. In the present context the point is the artistry with which Kipling here, within one story, handles the fates of a number of characters, and brings them together in a scene where they become exponents of different attitudes to an idea.

2. The most remarkable characteristic of the stories in Kipling's late manner is that they have several layers of meaning. Thus, *The Eye of Allah* is, on one level, a story about what happens to a group of people in a mediaeval monastery; on another level it is a story about a premature discovery; on a third it is about the impact of the Renaissance on the mediaeval world picture; on a fourth about the attitude of the artist, the physician, and the philosopher to science; and on the fifth about four aspects of civilization, personified as the artist, the scientist, the

philosopher, and the church dignitary and statesman, and illustrated by confronting them with an emblem of the new science: the microscope.

The Gardener is on one level a story about an unmarried mother who loses her son in the War. On the second, its theme is the English Gentlewoman and the penalties of having to observe the conventions of a 'civilized' life. On a third it is a transposition of the Biblical theme of Mary Magdalene, in which the grave of Helen's lost son becomes the symbol of her love for him, which she has to 'bury' because her code of manners forces her to conceal that he was illegitimate. On the fourth it is a story of the mercy of God to sinners: The Gardener in the war cemetery (who is Christ) takes away Helen's burden of secrecy, and releases her love from the compulsion of her code of respectability by showing that he knows that the dead-soldier whose grave she is looking for was her son. Or, in the words of the accompanying poem, he rolls away the stone of the Sepulchre, as did the angel in the New Testament account.

Kipling comments on this device of multiple meanings in *Something of Myself* (pp. 190-1). He is speaking of the stories in *Rewards and Fairies* (1910), where he does use this technique, though nothing like to the same extent as in *The Eye of Allah*, *The Gardener*, and many other stories he was later on to write:

Yet, since the tales had to be read by children, before people realized that they were meant for grown-ups; and since they had to be a sort of balance to, as well as a seal upon, some aspects of my 'Imperialistic' output in the past, I worked the material into three or four overlaid tints and textures, which might or might not reveal themselves according to the shifting

light of sex, youth, and experience. It was like working lacquer and mother o' pearl, a natural combination, into the same scheme as niello and grisaille, and trying not to let the joints show.

So I loaded the book up with allegories and allusions . . . It was glorious fun; and I knew it must be very good or very bad because the series turned itself off (i.e. like a tap) just as *Kim* had done.

It is implied in this passage that Kipling did not expect all readers to understand all the layers of the stories in *Rewards and Fairies*, and that he thought they could be enjoyed even if some of them were missed or remained uncomprehended. Indeed, this goes without saying, as these tales are ostensibly for children. Very few children could possibly understand the symbolic meaning of, say, *Cold Iron*, or appreciate the intricate and indirect effects of the sombre story called *The Tree of Justice*, but even children could—though perhaps with some difficulty as regards the last-named tale—follow the action, which constitutes the most obvious layer of meaning.

This is indeed the case with all the stories in Kipling's late manner: they are always capable of disclosing at least their first-level meaning to the attentive reader. I believe this is true even of the two most refractory ones, *Mrs Bathurst* and *The Dog Hervey*, though admittedly it takes heavy labour to make them yield that meaning.

But Kipling's technical innovations in *Rewards and Fairies* differ from those in his later tales in that the symbolism and the structural refinements are, as it were, works of supererogation: those who understand them get an added enjoyment from the tale, but it can be read with pleasure even by those who do not. Late stories, like for instance *Unprofessional* and *The Dog Hervey*, on the

other hand, are merely bewildering without a fairly complete understanding.

In fact, in those stories where Kipling's technical experiments are carried out to the bitter end, the layers of meaning behind that of the narration of events, and the symbolic and structural devices, are so closely woven into the narrative that to miss them may sometimes deprive the tale of most of its attraction. Even the first-level meaning is sometimes so indirectly expressed that it takes very careful reading to make anything of it without a grasp of the underlying symbolical implications. This applies, for example, to *Unprofessional*, which does not appear to have been recognized by critics as the astrological tale it is meant to be.¹

3. The stories are shot through with symbolic effects. The means by which a layer of meaning behind the surface is indicated are nearly always symbolical. Generally, the action of the tale itself serves as a symbol of an esoteric meaning, and is the vehicle for an idea, or even several ideas, that on a cursory reading may appear to have nothing to do with the events described.

Thus, as was shown above, *The Eye of Allah* has at least four subsidiary meanings in addition to the more obvious one. *Unprofessional* is ostensibly about a new cure for cancer. On another level it is about astrology. A *Madonna of the Trenches* is outwardly a supernatural story about two lovers who meet after death. On another level it is about the way in which the discovery of unsuspected forces shatters a life-pattern that has hitherto been 'normal': the young soldier Strangwick witnesses a love that is stronger than death, and this makes it impossible for him

¹ See below, p. 107.

to accept the safe, everyday environment to which he had adapted himself.

On the surface, *Dayspring Mishandled* looks like one of Kipling's usual revenge and retribution stories, with the only difference that here the revenge is the result of a fantastically elaborate plan that entirely engrosses the revenger throughout most of his life. But in reality, as Dr Tompkins has shown,¹ the ultimate meaning of the story is a *criticism* of the revenge fantasies that are so common in much of Kipling's work: Manallace's brooding on his revenge scheme is a vice, like drug-taking. *The Bull That Thought* has a long range of meanings behind the one expressed directly by the narrative, and these hidden meanings are much more important than the first-level one, which is only a scaffolding to carry the other themes that form the essential content of the tale.²

One of the recurrent themes of the late tales, that of disease and healing, also has a symbolic significance. Disease stands for those forces that menace happiness and peace of mind and make human life insecure, while healing represents the benevolent powers that combat them, and, in Kipling's later work, nearly always vanquish them. For in these stories the emphasis is always on the healing, rather than the disease.

The symbolism is, however, not confined to the action. In some of the stories there is also a network of words, phrases and themes that have a symbolic function and usually point towards an underlying meaning. Thus, in *The Eye of Allah*, the narrative is interwoven with references to birth and abortion, which point to, and bring into greater prominence, the theme of the microscope as

¹ Op. cit., pp. 147-55.

² See Chapter IV.

an invention born out of its time, and 'aborted' by Abbot Stephen. In the same story, the mediaeval order, which the advent of empiric science is to destroy, is symbolized by the orderly world of the monastery, and by the passage where the abbot and his guests see from its roof the view of the landscape spread in front of them:

Three English counties laid out in evening sunshine around them; church upon church, monastery upon monastery, cell after cell, and the bulk of a vast cathedral moored on the edge of the banked shoals of sunset.

The words 'moored on the edge of the banked shoals of sunset' serve the additional purpose of clinching the comparison of the monastery to a ship, which is indirectly suggested throughout the story, but not made explicit before. When Abbot Stephen receives his visitors at his table he takes off his ring and drops it into a silver cup. When he prepares to give his verdict about the microscope he puts on the ring again: a symbol that he is now speaking, not as a host to his guests, but as a dignitary of the Church about to make a momentous decision. And that he uses a dagger to shatter the microscope is also a symbolical touch: it is the Temporal Arm of the Church that destroys the premature invention.

The microscope has a twofold symbolical function: in addition to symbolizing the advent of the new science, it also stands for Art: it is brought back from Spain by John, the artist, who only cares for it as a means to achieve artistic ends; and in its effect on Brother Thomas it symbolizes the cathartic effect of art: the sight of the animalculae which it reveals convinces him that what he believed were shapes sent by the devil to haunt him in his dreams are really part of the wonders of Creation. His very name

is symbolical, suggesting the Doubter of the New Testament.

In *A Madonna of the Trenches*, the main theme—that of the victory of Love over Death—is presented on a background that symbolizes the Empire of Death in the shape of the front line with its decaying or frozen corpses.¹ In *Unprofessional*, the astrological idea that fate is determined by the stars, transposed in the story into a scientific theory of cosmic radiation, is symbolized by two scenes: a mouse which is the subject of the preliminary experiment kills itself after being cured of cancer. Afterwards a woman who has been operated on for the same disease with due observation of the direction of the rays, tries to commit suicide—the cure runs counter to the decrees of the stars: the mouse and the woman were predestined to die of cancer, and they are both of them urged by an inner compulsion to fulfil their prescribed destinies by seeking death. Both in *Friendly Brook* and *My Son's Wife*, the flooded brook symbolizes benevolent powers of Nature that purge away impurities, and come to the assistance of those who know, or learn, how to fall into step with her.

Two examples from *They* may serve as further illustrations: when first the 'I' of the tale comes to the garden of the blind lady where the dead children play, his car is brought up against a yew tree clipped to represent a horseman, whose spear points at the visitor's breast: the yew is

¹ The miserable, squinting dog in *The Dog Hervey* is not primarily a symbol. It is part of the first level of the story, which is about a piece of witchcraft: Miss Sichliffe projects her love for Shend—one of the lame ducks that her father turned into alcoholics, and the only person who ever showed her kindness and respect—into the animal and by some process that remains obscure makes Shend see it in hallucinations, until in the end it leads him back to her, and everything is well.

a traditional symbol of death, and the lance signifies that he has come to a territory which it is forbidden the living to explore. As he drives to the place on his last visit, during which he realizes that his own little daughter is one of the dead children in the garden, a sea fog descends on the countryside, and 'in less than an hour summer England vanished in chill grey': he is on his way to an encounter in the land of shades. Examples of such symbols embedded in the narrative could be multiplied almost indefinitely.¹

The symbols are usually unobtrusive, and planted in the context of the narrative with an appearance of being merely descriptive details.² They are therefore easily overlooked, and this must have been one of the reasons why contemporary criticism almost entirely failed to understand the full meaning of these tales.

One would expect a writer so concerned with symbolic effects to give his characters names that suggested their personalities or their role in the story, as, for example, Dickens habitually did. But this is not the case with Kipling. He liked to give his characters odd names, but these hardly ever seem to be more than arbitrary labels; they do not give one the feeling, as do Dickens's most felicitous names, that this is the only one that the character in question could have, and that any other would strike a wrong note. The only exceptions I can think of are Manallace in

¹ See also Chapters II, IV, V and VII.

² In his late manner the descriptive passages are fewer and more condensed than is usually the case in his early and middle period. The impressionistic technique by which, for example, the sounds and movement of the sea are evoked in *Captains Courageous* and *Their Lawful Occasions* by means of a number of carefully selected verbs and adjectives, is replaced by another where a similar effect is obtained by a more rigorous selection, and sometimes by one single word.

Dayspring Mishandled, where the name does seem somehow to express the man's self-imprisonment in his obsessive revenge schemes, perhaps because it suggests 'manacles' and 'mania', and Gleeag in the same story. To me at least, this name calls up the idea of a smooth, facile, and rather indeterminate person.¹

It is the same with the titles of the stories. Either Kipling did not care very much what he called them, or he was not very inventive in this respect, for a good many of them are quite nugatory, consisting merely in the name of the principal character (e.g. *Mary Postgate*, *Mrs Bathurst*) or a description of the tale (*The Miracle of St Jubanus*, *The Village That Voted the Earth Was Flat*) or a very simple pun (e.g. *Beauty Spots*). Some of them, but not very many, do however have overtones that throw light on one of the themes of the story, for example, in his last collections, *The Edge of the Evening*, *The Eye of Allah*, *Dayspring Mishandled*, *The Vortex* and possibly *My Son's Wife*.²

¹ Actually, Kipling was aware of the possibilities afforded by names: in *A Madonna of the Trenches* he makes the young soldier say that he called his aunt Auntie Armine, 'because it sounded more like her—like somethin' movin' slow, in armour'. When Kipling did not exploit the symbolic overtones of names, it must be because he did not possess the special kind of inventiveness this calls for, or possibly because at the time when he wrote there had been a reaction against Dickens, who was the chief exponent of this type of name symbolism.

² If so, the implications of the last-mentioned title are indirect and subtle. The phrase is an echo from Jean Ingelow's poem *High Tide on the Coast of Lincolnshire*, which the protagonist, Midmore, hears sung by the girl he later on falls in love with. Midmore's father does not appear in the story. There is a brief mention of his mother, suggesting that she is a silly woman, and that Kipling has no more liking for her than for the Immoderate Left to which Midmore belongs, and which is described with the virulent hatred that Kipling was always apt to

On the other hand, the titles of the *collections* sometimes appear to sum up some idea applicable to the stories they contain. Thus, *Debits and Credits* and *Limits and Renewals* suggest respectively an old man taking stock of his life's work and striving to get beyond what he has hitherto done, and *The Day's Work* is seen, in the light of the origin of the title and the arrangement of the tales, to have some very curious overtones.¹ But in general it may be said that the reader in search of clues to symbolical or hidden meanings will get no help from the names of the characters and very little from those of the stories.

4. There is a veritable cult of indirectness and concealment. The clues to the subsidiary layers of meaning are nearly always buried in passages that, on a cursory reading, appear to be about something quite different. Even information that might appear necessary for the understanding of the action is sometimes treated in this way. In *They* it is never said in so many words that the children in the garden are dead. In *The Gardener* it is not until the last ten lines of the story that we are told explicitly that the dead soldier, who throughout has been referred to as Helen Turrell's nephew, is really her son.

bestow on Liberals and left-wing people. It is true that to those who know Jean Ingelow's poem well enough the title will serve as a 'foreboding device' suggesting the flood which is the climax of the story. But any quotation from the poem would do, if that were all that the title was to communicate. As the title cannot refer to Midmore's parents, it looks as if it is meant to express some general idea that Kipling connected with the tale. The only explanation I can think of is this: Midmore is rescued from the vicious set he has fallen into by the love of a healthy, unsophisticated girl; in these times when the young are exposed to the allurements of the Immoderate Left, this is what any right-thinking father would wish for his son.

¹ Cf. p. 1.

In these two stories, however, it is made much easier for the reader than usual, because there are so many, and so unmistakable, clues that one would think nobody could miss them. (Nevertheless a good many contemporary readers, and even critics, seem to have done so in the case of *They*.) In *The Gardener*, already the first page contains five pieces of information, all of them part of the façade Helen puts up, and quite consistent with Michael's being her nephew, and not her son. None of them is apparently slanted by the author, and yet each is somehow so presented as to reveal the truth—a veritable triumph of indirect communication. This is brought off by an exceptionally deft use of *style indirect libre*: though it is ostensibly the omniscient author who speaks here (whose statements are normally supposed to be true) the wording is not quite like him, and strikes one as reflecting rather the version of events that Helen puts about, and the village gossip about her.

But to understand what *The Dog Hervey* is about at all demands considerable ingenuity, while in *Mrs Bathurst*, what happens to the two principal characters must be deduced from fragments of the conversation of three men, and from a number of ingeniously hidden clues.

The characterization of the *dramatis personae* is often indirect too, and must be gathered from passages scattered all over the story. Thus, in *The Eye of Allah*, as was mentioned above in another connection, the most important thing we learn about Brother Thomas is his fear that the devil is tempting him in his dreams, by visions of a kind familiar from representations of St Anthony, but this can only be understood from clues so carefully buried that they are likely to be missed at the first reading.

In *Mary Postgate* the young airman Wynn, whom the

middle-aged 'companion' Mary loves as if he were her son, plays an important part in the story because it is her feelings for him that explain the sadism with which she watches, with quiet enjoyment, the death throes of the German airman.¹ Yet Wynn never comes on the scene; he has been killed before the story begins. His character and his relationship with Mary Postgate are built up, first in the early pages by a number of indirect touches: incidents that the adoring Mary remembers and that show the mixture of affection and good-natured contempt which is all that she got from him to satisfy her maternal love. And later on, the catalogue of the dead man's things which she burns—boys' books, toys, cricket balls, broken gramophone records, school and O.T.C. photographs, and a silver prize cup—becomes an epitome of his short life.

¹ This is generally regarded as the worst example of Kipling's pre-occupation with revenge and cruelty, but I wonder if this view does justice to a very subtle story, where obviously a good deal must be read between the lines. It is, in fact, one of the few of his revenge stories where it is possible to make out a case for *not* identifying the writer's attitude with that of the revenger. The most shocking thing about this tale is the suggestion of a sexual element in Mary Postgate's enjoyment of the German airman's agony. This is sadism in the original sense of the word, and it is difficult to believe that he could have approved of that. The story is placed last in *A Diversity of Creatures*, which means that he wanted to call special attention to it, and the suggestion of sexual sadism is conveyed (by a piece of indirect communication) in its very last sentence. Is it really believable that Kipling should have gone on record like that with what would be almost a glorification of a perversion? But there is another possible interpretation. The accompanying poem speaks of the Germans as having taught the English to hate for the first time in history. It may well be that the story is meant as an example of the spiritual harm that Germany has done to the English: this is what it has come to, that a kindly and respectable English spinster finds herself turned into a torturer.

5. Some of the tales, especially those where the story is not told by the 'I', but to the 'I' by somebody else, or where what happens has to be gathered from a conversation, have what may be called a frame: the narrative is sandwiched between an introduction that sets the stage for the telling of the story, and a concluding passage that provides a curtain for it. The device is not confined to those tales where the 'I' is present. It is used, for example, in *The Manner of Men*, where this is not the case.

The use of a frame of this kind is, of course, traditional, and it has a long ancestry. In Kipling's time it was exploited by Conrad to give an added dimension to the story by throwing an indirect light on the characters of the narrator and his listeners. Kipling used such frames very early, for example very effectively in *On Greenhow Hill* (1890), where Leroyd's tragic love story is thrown into relief by an introductory scene where he and his two soldier friends are lying in wait for a deserter, whom Leroyd finally shoots, and who, it is suggested, may also have been 'tied up with a lass'. In others he uses it, also quite early, to anticipate the mood of the narrative, or to provide a background for the latter, as in the description of the hot Indian night in *With the Main Guard*, the soldiers round the camp-fire in *The Courting of Dinah Shadd*, and the scene after the murder in the barrack square in *Love-o'-Women*.

A frame may be purely descriptive, and this is in fact the case in some of Kipling's earlier tales. All the Puck stories have frames, but most of these serve another purpose than the characteristic frame of his late manner: they are vignettes describing the countryside near Kipling's house in Sussex, where Dan and Una meet Puck and the men and women who were once associated with

the place. They often strike a note that expresses the mood of the story they introduce, by their evocation of the season and the weather. These vignettes are among the best things Kipling ever did, and they add greatly to the attraction of the tales, but only in the last two stories, *Simple Simon* and *The Tree of Justice*, are they used for directly symbolic effect: to foreshadow or elucidate themes from the narrative.

About the middle of his literary career, however, Kipling evolved another type of frame that was particularly adapted to his late manner: the frame is used to throw a new light on the events of the story, which sometimes could hardly be fully understood without it, and it contains clues that help to explain symbolic passages in the narrative. This is in some cases done by making the frame play through themes that, on closer examination, prove to be echoes of themes in the narrative itself, but transposed in the same way as a composer plays variations on a musical motif, or as an overture gives a foretaste of the *leitmotifs* of an opera. This kind of frame first occurs in *Mrs Bathurst*: in this respect too, that story (together with *They*) is the starting point of his late manner. The device is exemplified in the interpretations of *Mrs Bathurst*, *The Prophet and the Country* and *The Bull That Thought*.

Kipling's frames vary a good deal in length and importance. They are usually short, but in *The Manner of Men* the frame, which contrasts the power and extent of the Roman Empire with the new religion, Christianity, is so long and so weighty that it almost usurps the place of the narrative. In the oddly constructed *In the Presence*, where the theme is the Sikh code of honour illustrated by a story of revenge, the frame is almost as long as the story it leads up to (which deals with another aspect of the Sikh concept

of honour), so that frame and story really constitute two separate tales loosely joined together.

6. One thing about Kipling's late manner that does not appear to have received much notice, if any, is the use of 'pointers' of various kinds designed to arrest the reader's attention so as to prevent (or try to prevent) him from missing some important point, and to direct him towards unexpected meanings.

Some of these 'pointers' address themselves to the sub-conscious rather than to the conscious mind: the reader does not perceive their significance when first he sees them, but later on, when he comes to the passage they are meant to throw light on, a vague memory of them helps him to interpret that passage as the writer intends him to. Used in this way, the device provides important clues to the meaning of some of the more enigmatic stories. A bare statement like this may not strike the reader as very convincing though the phenomenon is in fact fairly common in poetry. With Kipling, it occurs quite frequently in an unmistakable manner, as will appear later in this chapter and in the interpretations of *Mrs Bathurst*, *The Prophet and the Country* and *The Bull That Thought*.¹

One type of pointer consists in the repetition of some word or phrase. The first time the reader comes across it he may not pay much attention to it, but with each recurrence he is more likely to realize that here is something

¹ The attempt made in the following pages to classify different types of pointers is based, not on the intrinsic character of the word or phrase in question, but on the function it has in the story. This implies that a pointer may belong to more than one group, because its function may vary with the context. Thus, the effect of a 'key word' may depend on its being repeated, in which case it also comes under the heading of 'repetition', and it may also at the same time form part of a cross-reference. (For these subspecies of pointers, see below.)

that the writer is calling attention to; or the word or phrase may remain in his subconscious mind, and thus prepare the ground for the understanding of some meaning hinted at later in the tale.

This is one of the few technical details on which Kipling himself makes a comment—though a somewhat cryptic one—in *Something of Myself* (p. 190). He says that he was at first in two minds about *Rewards and Fairies*, but 'My doubts cleared away with the first tale *Cold Iron*, which gave me my underwood: "What else could I have done?"—the plinth of all structures.' The phrase 'What else could I have done', sometimes slightly varied, occurs in eleven of the twelve stories in the collection, in all thirteen times. It is not quite clear what he intends to convey by this particular repetition. For one thing, the passage from *Something of Myself* quoted above appears to indicate that he is referring to his own activity in writing these stories: that they forced themselves on him, as it were, and that his pen was guided by his 'demon' when he wrote them.¹ But he also projected this experience of his own on to the stories, where the recurrence of the phrase serves to emphasize that many of the tales in this volume describe a difficult and painful choice: confronted with two alternatives, the character in question feels bound to choose one that imposes a heavy burden on him.

When in *The Manner of Men* one finds seven mentions of the Beasts (with a capital B) of the Roman arena, though these do not figure in the story itself, one knows that the Beasts must be meant to express some important idea (which in this tale is never made explicit at all): the Beasts are the ultimate horror. Even the Romans, who can bear

¹ Cf. also *Something of Myself*, pp. 209-10.

the prospect of 'fire—sword—the sea—torture even—' flinch at the thought of them. That Paul, who has fought the Beasts already, and whose back is scarred with their bites, pursues a course that he believes will end by his being thrown to the lions, is a measure of the strength his faith has given him.

A slightly different use of repetition is found in *Unprofessional*, where the context makes the meaning of a repeated phrase progressively clearer as the story moves on. As has already been shown, the story is on the first level about the discovery of cosmic rays that determine the behaviour of cellular tissue from the moment of birth. Early in the tale, the conversation of the principal characters turns for a moment to astrology, and later on, one phrase is repeated so insistently that the reader begins to connect it with this earlier mention of astrology, which seemed quite irrelevant to the plot, and finally he realizes that the story has a secondary theme: the astrological idea that a person's fate is determined by the position of the heavenly bodies at his nativity. The following will give some idea of the process:

A woman called Mrs Berners is operated on for cancer under such conditions as to bring the beneficent influences of the rays to bear on her, and she is apparently cured. But a little later on she begins to show signs of restlessness. She develops a trick of tossing her head, which the scientists have also observed in mice that have been subjected to the same treatment, and that have tried to kill themselves after the cure. She has an air of listening to something, and she says that she feels in people's way and ought to go elsewhere. A little later, this becomes 'I must be off elsewhere where I'm wanted'. Finally, she goes into a violent fit and tries to smash her head against the wall,

and now the phrase is repeated four times in such a way as to leave no doubt of its meaning:

'I don't want to die. But I've *got* to. I've reely *got* to get out of this. I'm wanted elsewhere.' 'I've *got* to. I've got to go where I'm wanted.' 'Why've I come all over like this? I ought to be busy dying.' 'I'm wanted elsewhere.'

The repetition of the phrase thus points towards the second, astrological, meaning of the story mentioned above in connection with another point: the cure was an interference in what was predetermined by the stars; Mrs Berners was to die on an appointed day, if not of cancer then by suicide.

These examples from *The Manner of Men* and *Unprofessional* illustrate a fairly simple use of the repetition device. The words that are repeated are themselves of some weight—they are in fact what below are called key words—but sometimes the device is also used to produce another and subtler effect: some word or phrase which, taken by itself, may look entirely insignificant, is repeated in such a way as to indicate that here is something the reader ought to notice and that will help to bring out the idea of the tale. This is the case, for example, in *The Woman in his Life*. Marden, a lonely and successful man, is going mad from a trauma contracted when he worked underground during the war, digging tunnels under the Messines Ridge. He is cured by acquiring a dog, which serves as a substitute for human company, the cure being completed when he forces himself to overcome his claustrophobia in crawling into a deep burrow where the dog has been trapped.

Early in the story the phrase 'repetition work' is used three times in entirely different connections: about

machinery, about the life of the rich, and about Marden's consumption of whisky. The word is itself a little odd in the last two cases, and the threefold repetition is even odder, especially when one remembers how diligently Kipling revised his manuscripts. But it has a function in this case: it helps to prepare the way for the realization that Marden's victory over the repressed fears behind his trauma is achieved by re-enacting ('repeating') the experience under the Messines Ridge from which it originated.

This was written at a time when Freudian psychology had become common property in England, and no doubt the majority of educated readers would have understood the idea even without the pointers. But I believe that for Kipling the repetition device, as well as some of the other types of pointer, also had an attraction of a purely aesthetic kind: he liked a story to form a systematically worked-out pattern with a criss-cross of interconnections between passages and themes.

In *The Dog Hervey* Miss Sichliffe's habit of making people presents of goldfish is mentioned no less than five times. The goldfish have nothing to do with the action of the story,¹ and this insistence on them appears pointless, until one sees that it must serve an ulterior purpose. The reference is somewhat enigmatic, but the most likely reading is that the goldfish (and the bowl in which she presumably sends them) symbolize the spiritual imprisonment of the rich and lonely woman in her sinister house, whose 'reek of varnish' in its turn symbolizes the respectability with which her father covered up the source

¹ Unless the witchcraft she practises to recall Shend demands that some object belonging to the witch is passed on to her 'victim', as in M. R. James's *Castling the Runes*. But this would not explain why the gift has to be goldfish.

of his wealth: he pretended to 'patch up' neurotic young men, while in fact he turned them into dipsomaniacs, insured them heavily, and then left them to drink themselves to death. The phrases 'not a good life' (about Miss Sichliffe's dog) and 'a poor life' (about her dreary existence) are no doubt meant as reminders of her father's insurance transactions. The phrase 'patch up' is used five times (if one counts the speech of Miss Sichliffe where she stops short before pronouncing it because of its unpleasant associations for her). It begins with the allusion to her father patching up his unfortunate patients. But gradually it assumes a wider significance. The whole story is about patching up: Miss Sichliffe's father patches up his victims, the narrator patches up her dog, the latter in its turn patches up Shend, the dipsomaniac she is in love with, and finally their frustrated love affair is patched up.

In *They* the phrase that the narrator comes from 'the other side of the county' is repeated six times. It signifies, of course, that he is a visitor from the country of the living to the country of the dead. In *In the Interests of the Brethren* the words ritual and ritualist are repeated eleven times. This looks too much even in a story about Freemasonry: only in three cases are they used to describe the actual ceremony at the lodge. In *In the Interests of the Brethren* is not really a story, it is a description of the narrator's introduction to a London lodge whose speciality is to take care of lame ducks from the front. The elevenfold repetition serves as a pointer to the idea round which the whole piece is written, viz. the beneficent and healing power of ritual, as exemplified by the Masonic lodge; in the words of Brother Burgess: 'All ritual is fortifyin'. Ritual is a natural necessity for mankind.'

The repetition device is generally used so discreetly that

it may easily escape notice, and I do not, in fact, remember having seen it mentioned anywhere. But once noticed, it is seen to be an effective means to realize the writer's intentions, and to occur systematically in a number of the stories.¹

It is well known that Kipling took great pains with his stories, especially those he wrote in the later stages of his career, and that he revised them again and again, each revision resulting in further abbreviation, until they were reduced to the absolute essentials. He describes the process in *Something of Myself* (pp. 207-8):

A tale from which pieces have been raked out is like a fire that has been poked. One does not know that the operation has been performed, but every one feels the effect. Note, though, that the excised stuff must have been honestly written for inclusion. I found that when, to save trouble, I 'wrote short' *ab initio* much salt went out of the work.

It is therefore very unlikely that real redundancies should have been allowed to stand, and in the stories written in his late manner any repetition that looks gratuitous should be examined as a potential clue to some esoteric meaning.

But, though repetition in Kipling's stories thus is rarely, if ever, purposeless, it may of course serve other purposes than the above. Thus, when in *Dayspring Mishandled* the phrase 'common form' recurs four times, it indicates two things: Castorley's boring and self-important manner, and later on, when Manallace uses it too, the way in which the latter's preoccupation with his victim causes him to pick

¹ It plays a prominent part in *Mrs Bathurst*, *The Bull That Thought*, and 'Teem', and it also figures in *The Prophet and the Country*, to the interpretations of which the reader is referred.

up his tricks of speech. Similarly, Manallace's four times repeated 'I wish she (you) hadn't said that' suggests his increasing discomfort at the turn his revenge scheme is taking, in that Castorley's wife has found out what he is about, and is outbidding him in hatred of her husband.

7. A second kind of pointer consists in parallelisms between themes and passages, most frequently between passages in the frame and in the body of the tale. This is one of the means by which the frame is used to throw light on the story, and, especially, to provide clues to symbolic elements in the latter. By interlocking passages from different parts of the story in this way, it is also a means to a purely artistic end: to prevent the frame and the story from falling too much apart. The most remarkable examples of this device are afforded by *The Prophet and the Country* and *The Bull That Thought*.¹ In the latter, the introductory part of the frame briefly states a whole set of themes each of which foreshadows what happens in the crucial scene at the bullfight.

8. A third kind of pointer is what one might call key words. These are words or phrases that call attention to themselves by their unexpected appearance in the context. Their function is sometimes to contribute to the mood of the story and sometimes to alert the reader and warn him that here is something he should notice in order to understand one of its themes, often—as was the case with the repetition device—by leaving a more or less conscious memory that colours the impression he receives from a later passage. The key words are often combined with the device of repetition. This is the case, for example, with the above-mentioned sevenfold occurrence of 'the

¹ See Chapters II and IV.

Beasts' in *The Manner of Men*, the way in which the words 'Art' and 'Artist' are interwoven with the narrative in *The Bull That Thought* and 'Teem',¹ and the repetition of 'The Powers' in *Wireless* (suggesting a comparison between the radio signals and poetic inspiration as an emanation from unknown Powers).

But their effect does not always depend on repetition. Compare for example 'witch-doctoring' and 'protection' in *The Prophet and the Country*,² and 'trespasser' and 'screen' in *They*: the narrator is a trespasser in the garden of the dead children, and the screen separates the living from the dead. Further 'abort' in the poem accompanying *The Eye of Allah*, which forms part of the symbolism of birth and abortion that runs through the story. When the narrator in *The House Surgeon* says that the solicitor is 'the only living soul I can get at who was connected with Holmescroft', the apparently banal phrase 'living soul' has an unexpected meaning: it alludes to the haunting of the house by the dead Miss Aggie. In *The Gardener*, the hotel near the war cemetery is a blue striped wooden structure, with 'a false front', a phrase that suggests the lie that Helen has been forced to act in pretending that the dead soldier was not her son.

The decadent bee community in *The Mother Hive* is destroyed in the end by 'light and fire' sent by the Bee Master. Even without the capitals and the hint that he appears as 'a Voice behind a Veil' it is easy to see that the Bee Master stands for God in the application of the fable to human conditions. But there is a further touch: the Bee Master has a son, whose identity is revealed when he puts in a good word for the bees: 'Can you blame 'em,

¹ For these, see Chapters IV and V.

² See Chapter II.

father?', which is of course an echo of 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'

The last pages of *The Church that was at Antioch* are punctuated with references to the Last Supper, Gethsemane and the Crucifixion. The first hint is a remark of the Roman prefect: 'There's no lying about in secluded parks for *us*.' This makes no sense in the context, and it is only when the rest of the allusions to the Passion begin to accumulate that one realizes that it is an allusion to the vigil in the garden of Gethsemane.

A cup is mentioned three times ('He passed a cup of almost unmixed wine', 'a raw cup', and 'a strong cup'), recalling, when once one becomes aware of the symbolic overtones, Matt. xxvi, 42: 'If this cup may not pass away from me except I drink it.' We are told several times that Peter's¹ right hand is palsied, and learn later on that it was 'the one he once held up in a hall to deny a charge', referring again to Matt. xxvi, where at the Last Supper Peter avers that he will never deny his Lord, and then denies him three times before cock-crow. That the mob at Antioch greets the Christians with cock-crows is another allusion to this.

When Paulus says in a discussion about unclean food: 'You admit it: Out of your own mouth it is evident', Petrus bewilders Paulus and Valens by 'an extraordinary outbreak'. He shakes like a leaf, his face works; he chokes and nearly succeeds in lifting his palsied hand while he retorts: 'Do you twit me with my accent?' The scene is incomprehensible until one realizes that what angers Petrus so violently is that he believes Paulus is alluding to

¹ Kipling uses the Latin forms Petrus and Paulus in this tale, probably because it is primarily about the Pax Romana, exemplified by the enlightened attitude of the Roman officials to the new religion.

another passage in Matt. xxvi, where Petrus denies that he is one of the disciples of Christ, and a Roman soldier says: 'Thy speech bewrayeth thee' (meaning that he speaks with a Galilean accent). And it is the same betrayal that Petrus refers to—again with a twitching face—when he says: 'One says more than one means when one is carried away.'

All this works up to a very remarkable climax: the young police officer Valens, who is stabbed in the street after preventing a mob attack on the Christian community, is from now on spoken of in terms that connect him with the Crucifixion and the Redemption. As Valens lies dying, Petrus says: 'Give him a drink and wait. I have—seen such a wound', which recalls both the spear wound of the crucified Christ and the offering of the sponge of vinegar. The dying man tells his uncle the Prefect: 'Don't be hard on them . . . They don't know what they are doing', recalling Luke xxiii, 34: Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. His mistress, the slave-girl, cries, in words that suggest the Redemption: 'He is mine—mine! I testify by all the Gods that he bought me! I am his. He is mine.' And the final lines run: 'The girl did not heed, for the brow beneath her lips was chilling, even as she called on *her God* (i.e. Valens) who had *bought her at a price* that he should *not die but live*' (my italics). What Kipling is doing here is clearly to indicate that Valens, the servant of Order and the Law, is in his own way a Saviour and a Redeemer—a similar point to the one he made in *The Manner of Men*, where the Pax Romana and Christianity are presented as two complementary forces.

The technique exemplified above is characteristic of Kipling's late manner: most of the pointers are so

unobtrusive that if they had occurred separately it would have been rash to read a symbolic meaning into them, if indeed one noticed that they might have such a meaning at all. Here, where they form a cluster of references to the New Testament, and most of them to one chapter of it at that, they mutually support one another.

The function of key words and key themes actually forms the substance of one of the stories, *Wireless*, which on one level describes how Gaynor is guided by such pointers furnished by his surroundings to identify himself with Keats in his subsequent trance.

9. There is another kind of pointer of which Kipling made systematic use in some of the stories. These are what one may call cross-references. They too serve to direct the reader's attention, or his subconscious mind, to meanings, overtones and structural effects: a word, a phrase, or an idea, is repeated further on in the story in such a way that a connection is established between the two passages in which it occurs. The device has both an explanatory and a structural function. In the former case, it calls attention to a parallelism between the two passages, which makes them throw a mutual light on each other, and thus makes it easier to catch their meaning, or, taken together, the two passages supplement each other. Structurally, the effect is to stress the unity of the story by showing that its various elements are interconnected.

Thus—to take an example where the effect is a stylistic refinement rather than informatory—in *A Madonna of the Trenches* Aunt Armine gives the soldier Strangwick a message to Sergeant Godsoe: 'I expect to be through with my little trouble by the 21st of the month, an' *I'm dyin' to see him* (my italics) as soon as possible after that date.' Later on we understand that the message was literal: she

was dying *in order* to see him, for they had promised each other to be united after death. In the same story Strangwick says: 'The reel thing's life an' death. It *begins* at death, d'ye see.' This prepares the way for a hidden meaning in the last line of the story (which one may expect anyhow to sum up its principal theme), the symbolic character of which one might otherwise miss: Dr Keede has given Strangwick a drug to send him to sleep, and says: 'All he wants now is to be kept quiet till he wakes.' Remembering the earlier passage, one realizes that the apparently simple sentence is meant to convey another meaning besides the literal one, viz. that Strangwick must put up with life until 'the real thing begins at death'. There are several instances of such complementary passages in *Mrs Bathurst* (where the story can only be understood by taking them into account), in *The Prophet and the Country*, and especially in *The Bull That Thought*.¹

10. From the very first Kipling was in the habit of prefacing his stories with a proverb, a quotation, or a few verse lines of his own. In the two *Jungle Books* each story is followed by a full-scale poem. *Traffics and Discoveries* (1904) is the first collection of tales for grown-up readers where each story is joined with a poem which precedes it. From now on all the stories are followed by a poem and sometimes also preceded by one.² They are nearly always connected with the story itself and throw an additional light on it, by illustrating the main theme of the narrative, by playing through one of its motifs, by calling attention to some hidden meaning, or by providing a commentary on the tale. They therefore generally help the reader to

¹ See Chapters II and IV.

² In some cases the poem is replaced by one of his Elizabethan dramatic pastiches.

understand its full implications, and, at least in one case, *Alnaschar and the Oxen*, which accompanies *The Bull That Thought*, the poem brings out an important layer of meaning which it would be nearly impossible to find by reading the story alone.¹

II. The above-mentioned features of Kipling's late technique are innovations. It remains to deal with one that is traditional, but which cannot very well be passed over, seeing that it has some bearing on the structure of the tales. This is the mechanism by which the events of the narrative are communicated to the reader.

It involves the problem of the authenticity claimed for these events: how does the writer come to know the story he is telling? Today this is, of course, an entirely artificial problem, but it may well have been a real one in the early stages of the novel, where simple-minded readers no doubt expected the author to make it clear what authority he had for what he put into the book. (Hence perhaps the popularity of the novel in the first person, the epistolary novel, and the novel in the form of a biography, in all of which there was a plausible pretext of authenticity.)

Of the various mechanisms among which a modern writer can choose, Kipling confined himself, with very few exceptions,² to three in his early and middle period,

¹ See Chapter IV, p. 17 ff.

² Such exceptions are the very early *Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes* (1885), which is heavily indebted to Poe, and where the events are narrated in a sort of memoir supposed to have come into the writer's possession, and the monologue stories in *In Black and White*. *A Sahib's War* (1901) is also a monologue story. *One View of the Question* (1890) (which is not really a story, but a political tract) is in the form of a letter, and so is *The Tie* (1932).

all of them traditional and fairly simple. One is that of the omniscient author, who is supposed to know all about what happens in the story without coming on the stage himself, and without giving any authority for what he narrates. This form is frequent in Kipling, and indeed some stories, like those of *Heaven and Hell*, could not very well be told in any other way.¹

In the second type there is an 'I', but he has nothing to do with the events of the story, which are told him by somebody else. This is comparatively rare, being only used ten times in his last six collections.² In the third type there is also an 'I', and here Kipling's *persona* witnesses the events of the story, though (except in '*Brugglesmith*', *The House Surgeon* and *The Dog Hervey*) he is always an observer rather than a participant. In the last-named tale he is one of the chief characters, but unaware of the role that Moira Sichliffe assigns to him in her piece of witchcraft, and this is underlined by the symbolical remark 'I am only a passenger'. This type is very common in Kipling.³

¹ As the figures may be of some importance as indications of the development undergone by Kipling's technique, I give them below for his last six collections apart from the Puck stories, which in this respect are in a class by themselves: the 'omniscient author' formula completely predominates in *The Day's Work*, where it is used in 11 of the 13 stories. But there are only 2 out of 11 (counting '*Their Lawful Occasions*' and *The Army of a Dream* I and II as one each) in *Traffics and Discoveries*. In *Actions and Reactions* there are 4 out of a total of 8. In *A Diversity of Creatures* and *Debits and Credits* the figures are 8 out of 14, and in *Limits and Renewals* 7 out of 14.

² It occurs once in *The Day's Work*, twice in *A Diversity of Creatures*; four times in *Traffics and Discoveries*; and once in *Actions and Reactions*, *Debits and Credits* and *Limits and Renewals*.

³ Here again the figures might be of some significance as an indication of the development of Kipling's technique. It is rare in *The Day's Work* (1 out of 13). In *Traffics and Discoveries* the figures are 8 out of

These, then, are the story forms that Kipling carried on from his early work. But at the same time as he began to write tales in his late manner, he evolved a form that was particularly suited to these strange, complicated, and often enigmatic stories and to the cult of indirectness that went with them: in some of the stories the events that constitute the action are not witnessed by the 'I', nor are they told him in an orderly sequence by somebody else: they emerge from the conversation of three or four characters, as a rule including the 'I'¹ (who, however, nearly always takes a subordinate part), and the reader has to piece them together for himself. This technique is first fully exploited in *Mrs Bathurst*, the most enigmatic of all the tales. Here, the device is used more thoroughly and consistently than in any subsequent story—even *The Manner of Men*, which comes closest to it in this respect, and which also makes heavy demands on the reader. After *Mrs Bathurst*, the device of making the action emerge from a conversation recurs in a number of stories. It is particularly frequent in *Debits and Credits*, where it is used in four of the fourteen tales.

For some time after 1904 Kipling did not continue his experiments in his new technique, and when he resumed it in *Rewards and Fairies* (1910) he handled it with more moderation than in *Mrs Bathurst*. This may be due to the

11, if parts I and II of 'Their Lawful Occasions' and *The Army of a Dream* are counted as one. *Actions and Reactions* has 4 out of 8, *A Diversity of Creatures* 4 out of 14, *Debits and Credits* and *Limits and Renewals* 5 out of 14 each.

¹ In *The Manner of Men* and *Sea Constables*, where this method is also used, there is no 'I'. In the former, this could indeed not very well be otherwise, seeing that the 'I' is Kipling's persona, and the scene is laid in the first century A.D.

reception of the two 1904 tales: *Mrs Bathurst* does not seem to have been understood by anybody, and *They* was, rather surprisingly, regarded as obscure for a long time after it appeared.¹

Some of the late stories embody practically all the technical devices dealt with above. The result is a highly organized and almost incredibly complex pattern of parallelisms, cross-references, and interconnections, where straightforward narrative alternates with indirect communication; where passages are sometimes meant to be taken literally, sometimes symbolically, and sometimes both; where words and phrases are brought into prominence by various means so as to indicate the importance of the messages they convey, and where one must expect practically every word and sentence to be as indispensable for the whole as a sequence of bars in a Beethoven quartet, though their full import may elude one after several readings.

Why did Kipling adopt this technique, which baffled most of his readers, and lost him his former popularity? It cannot, surely, be because he wanted to write books whose meaning was made deliberately inaccessible. There can be only one explanation: he thought he had devised a new form of short story that enabled him to make the tales artistically more satisfactory than those he once wrote. Very likely he believed, with some justice, that the 'straight' short story of the 90's was played out, and that it

¹ Carrington: *Rudyard Kipling*, p. 469: 'There are cryptic elements in *They* . . .' Hilton Brown: *Rudyard Kipling*, p. 137: 'Some honestly admitted their inability to understand what it was all about'. Edward Shanks (*Rudyard Kipling*, p. 253 ff.) finds it necessary to explain it at great length. *They* was discussed in the Kipling Society on May 18th, 1938, several of the participants apparently regarding the story as enigmatic (*Kipling Journal*, October 1938).

had become hackneyed through the magazine writers, including the imitators of his own earlier work. What he now wanted to write was a kind of story that was to rely more on the effects used in poetry than on those that had become traditional in a prose tale. A story in his early manner is—like the run of short stories of the 90's—usually experienced as a sequence evolving along the time line: the events of the action are narrated in their chronological order, beginning at page one and moving on to the last page. In the process, one thing is added to another, and when one comes to the conclusion, that is that, and the tale can be regarded as done with.

The new type was to be, as de Saussure said about language, *un système où tout se tient*, a whole that is more than the sum of its parts, because the effect of each of these depends on its interaction with the others. It was to be experienced like a poem, in that all its elements had to be present to the reader simultaneously if he was to grasp their mutual interplay, as he would have to do in order to understand the story completely. And this implies that he must not read it only once, like an ordinary story, but repeatedly, as one has to do with a poem. In other words, his late manner involves a 'poetization' of the short story: the new technique largely consists in taking over devices hitherto regarded as appropriate to poetry only. As has already been said: the resulting stories are, in some ways, closer to poetry like T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* than to the tales in Kipling's earlier manner, or indeed to the run of English short stories in the 90's.

The term 'clue' is used throughout about Kipling's 'pointers', because it is a short and handy word, and because for the interpreter these *are* clues. But this is not meant to imply that they were also primarily clues for the

writer. For him, that function may well have been subordinate. He may well have thought that the symbolism was obvious enough to be perceived by the attentive reader, and the chief motive of his elaborate pattern of allusions, hints and pointers, as well as the network of crisscross references from one point of the story to another, may have been to produce a pleasing artistic effect. In fact, with the possible exception of *Mrs Bathurst*, he invariably took care to insert so many clues that the full meaning can *always* be understood if the reader is patient enough to notice them all. To take one instance: in *The Dog Hervey* there are about thirty clues to the witchcraft theme. The difficulty is that most of Kipling's clues are so inconspicuous, being disguised as descriptive details or bits of quite natural conversation.

It is indeed difficult to think of any other motive than the one suggested above. It is true that he had a strongly developed privacy complex, that he rarely told the public anything about his private feelings and experiences except by indirect hints (as in *They* and *Merrow Down*), and that he was fond of minor mystifications, as in the poems and dramatic fragments he attributed to other writers. Very likely he despised the critics who failed to appreciate, or even understand, work in which he took pride.¹ But he was also a writer with a large and devoted public, whose approval he must have valued, and it cannot have been with a light heart that he deliberately threw away his popularity. It is unthinkable that he should have sought obscurity for its own sake; when he adopted his new technique it must have been because of an artistic integrity, and a sense of loyalty to his vocation, of which his career provides many other examples.

¹ Cf. p. 70 f.

CHAPTER VII

THE HARDEST OF ALL THE STORIES

MRS BATHURST

SINCE it first appeared in 1904 *Mrs Bathurst* has always been regarded as the most enigmatic of Kipling's stories. In this respect, it is in a class by itself: all the other obscure stories yield *one* meaning, if only one studies them carefully enough. The difficulty is that they have several layers of meaning, and that the reader who senses the presence of one of the less obvious ones may find it hard to track it down with the help of the clues that Kipling provided.

But in *Mrs Bathurst* the difficulty is of another order: no one seems to have been able to say what this tale is about at all. To my knowledge, up to 1962 no-one has even tried to give a complete interpretation, i.e. one that makes a coherent pattern of the story, though it has by now challenged students of Kipling for nearly 60 years.¹

¹ There are numerous discussions of *Mrs Bathurst* in the *Kipling Journal*, but none of them results in real interpretations in the above sense of the term. The most valuable of these contributions is 'Readers' Guide to Mrs "Bathurst"' (*sic*) by R. E. Harbord in Nos. 133, 135 and 136. It takes the form of a running commentary with useful topographical, naval, etc., information, and a discussion of 'improbabilities' in the story.

A short article in the *Kipling Journal* for December 1938 by Lt.-Col. B. S. Browne contains some eight or ten lines that show he is on the right track, though he does not follow it up. He stresses the importance of the film theme and the novelty of the cinema at the time the

Incidentally, it is a triumph of Kipling's art that *Mrs Bathurst*, for all its obscurity, is somehow satisfactory—every person to whom I have ever shown it has become absorbed by it.

It has been conjectured that the tale has gone to pieces for the writer, in the literal sense of the word—that in the course of the continuous revisions of the first draft, which we know it was his habit to undertake, he inadvertently left out clues that would have explained it all. I find it difficult to believe this. For one thing Kipling was too careful a writer to have done that. For another, he could hardly have failed to notice mistakes of this kind when he revised the story for *Traffics and Discoveries* after it had first been published in the *Windsor Magazine*. And, finally, he speaks in *Something of Myself* (p. 101) with obvious satisfaction of the way it 'slid into his mind'. In any case, the fact that Kipling undertook a revision of the story between its first appearance in the *Windsor*

story was written, and remarks: 'I suggest that Kipling was studying the effect of such an apparition of someone loved and wronged. . . and he makes it result in driving that spectator so near to the edge of madness that his captain took the extreme measure of conniving at his desertion.' Like the rest of the material from the *Kipling Journal* this was unknown to me when I first published my interpretation in the *Orbis Litterarum*. As the present book went to press I received Elliot L. Gilbert's paper *What Happens in 'Mrs Bathurst'* (P.M.L.A. 1962). This is primarily a brilliant analysis of the thematic structure of the story, which is shown to illustrate throughout the indifference of the Universe to man, and the apparent fortuitousness that governs human fate. This paper is the only one I know of that explains the functional role of the Boy Niven episode in the story. It is less concerned with the plot and, to my mind, less satisfactory on that head.

Magazine and its inclusion in *Traffics and Discoveries* practically rules out this theory.¹

A contribution to the *Kipling Journal* (No. 132, December 1959), by Lt.-Col. B. S. Browne, (cf. p. 124) offers another explanation: the story is 'a farrago of nonsense' and a deliberate hoax: Kipling wanted to see how bad a story he could get away with. The writer surmises that 'the ghastly accounts of Pyecroft's walks with Vickery were meant as a warning not to take the story too seriously', and that the Boy Niven episode may be 'a warning to the innocent reader that he too is being kept wandering in circles by an innocent-seeming writer'. This theory takes no account of Kipling's own remarks about *Mrs Bathurst* in *Something of Myself*, or of his general attitude to his work, both of which make it untenable.

I think Dr Tompkins is right in her suggestion² that Kipling may have wanted to make the story reflect the style of the early film picture that plays such a great part in it, where the figures fade out as they approach the spectator. This is, in fact, an exact description of what he does with the principal characters and events: at one point they step out of the direct narrative, and what happens the reader must piece together from earlier bits of information.

Altogether, it is a much more probable explanation of the obscurity of the story than that of the careless abbreviation, that, in adopting this technique, Kipling overestimated the clues he provided: they are difficult to pick up, because the action is not told by a single narrator, and is not told consecutively, but emerges gradually from the conversation of four speakers.

¹ See below, p. 150 ff.

² Op. cit., p. 90 n.

But the story *must* have a definite meaning, and it must be possible to get at it, if only one picks up the right trail. The following is offered as an explanation of that meaning. It is, of course, impossible to *prove* that such an explanation is correct. All one can do is to take care that it is compatible with all the clues one is able to find. As there are a very considerable number of clues, there is a strong presumption that an interpretation compatible with them all is the correct one, though it is, of course, logically possible, if not very likely, that they might also be compatible with another explanation as well.

Students of Kipling's obscurer stories need hardly be reminded that they are condensed to an extraordinary degree. There is hardly anything in them that does not have some significance. Every sentence can contain a meaning that may often be grasped only after repeated readings. In the present tale, it will appear from the following that an astonishing amount of information about the writer's intentions is to be found in unexpected places. This information is scattered all over the story, but, once assembled, it will be found to hang together and to fall into a coherent scheme.

It may be objected that the labour of the critic in trying to elucidate one single story (and that of his readers in working their way through his exposition) is disproportionate to the interest of the task. But *Mrs Bathurst* is not only a puzzle. A close examination of it opens wider perspectives: the story is an early, highly interesting, and very bold experiment in a technique far in advance of the time, and foreshadowing that of Kipling's late years. Briefly, it consists in extreme condensation, a network of cross-references from one passage to others, and an indirectness that leaves it to the reader to provide the conclusion of all

the crucial episodes from hints dropped elsewhere in the story. This method is carried through far more radically, as far as I can see, than in any of the late stories. In *Mrs Bathurst* we thus get the technique of the latter in a state of pure cultivation.

As readers cannot be expected to know the whole of *Mrs Bathurst* by heart, it will be necessary to begin with a synopsis of the story that includes what I take to be the clues planted in it by the writer. This is obviously not quite fair, as, in so doing, one might miss counter-clues that others might perhaps find. Also there is admittedly a subjective element in any decision as to what *is* a clue. I have therefore included in the synopsis everything I thought might possibly be regarded as clues, even when I do not think they are. The clues will have to be further elaborated in connection with the interpretation. In order to avoid unnecessary duplication they are only given in their barest outline in the synopsis, and the reader is referred to the interpretation for a fuller treatment.

At the opening of the story the narrator, whose role is throughout one of an observer, finds himself on a beach near Cape Town. I agree with Dr Tompkins¹ that the scenery is intended to strike the dominant note of the tale, and that it is meant to evoke the idea of a Greek coast as an appropriate setting for the appearance of the Goddess Aphrodite (cf. the Homeric 'seven coloured sea'. The very word 'Greek', which occurs twice in a prosaic context—Greek immigrants who sell beer—serves, I believe, as one of those discreet verbal pointers that Kipling was later on to use so much as a means to direct the reader towards the right associations).

The narrator meets three men: railway inspector

¹ Op. cit., p. 90.

Hooper, a Sergeant of Marines called Pritchard, and the bluejacket Pyecroft, who figures in several other tales. Their talk at first centres on two subjects that both adumbrate the subsequent events of the story. One is the love affairs of sailormen, and the other is deserters. The first is treated in a way that must have some significance. It emphasizes a certain fickleness and lack of seriousness in the sailors' relations with women: the uniform always 'fetches 'em'; one of the sailors mentioned is 'mormonastic', and Pyecroft and Pritchard agree that, though they have had intimate relations with hundreds of women, they have forgotten all but two or three of them.

In connection with one of the men who have deserted because of a girl, we get the commentary: 'It takes them at all ages', and it is said that if a man becomes infatuated with a woman of superior charm and character, 'he goes crazy—or *just saves himself*' (I italicize the last words because they are of some importance for my interpretation).

The talk works round to two acquaintances of the sailors. One is a warrant officer called Vickery, who has recently deserted. The picture of Vickery¹ that emerges is that of a 'superior', somewhat finicky and not very likeable man. He tries to be 'genteel' in his speech, but his badly made false teeth click when he gets excited. He has a daughter of fifteen and his wife has recently died in childbed. He must be middle-aged, for he is due to be pensioned off in eighteen months' time. When later on he deserts, we are told that he first punctually executed

¹ To save readers from starting on a false trail, I would recall the fact that the *names* of the characters in Kipling are practically never symbolic or serve as clues to the understanding of the character in question, or the story.

the commission on which he was sent up-country. Altogether, one gets the impression of a staid and somewhat pedestrian person who is careful in the performance of his duties, a man who conforms to lower middle-class ideas of respectability—in short an entirely unglamorous person and a type of man from whom one would not expect anything in the way of romantic passion. Paradoxically, this has been seized on by critics as the very reason why he *should* be the victim of such a passion, on the grounds that Kipling is obviously out to make the point that the attacks of Aphrodite on her prey are unpredictable. This looks plausible enough, especially as Kipling later in life made the same point with the protagonists of *A Madonna of the Trenches*. But that is after all 'another story', and it will appear below that the function of the character assigned to Vickery is susceptible of another interpretation. However that may be, it seems clear that the characterization of Vickery is meant to serve a purpose later in the story.¹

It is suggested that Vickery has had a love affair with the woman who gives her name to the story. Mrs Bathurst is—or was—the proprietress of a small hotel at Hauraki in New Zealand, frequented by the lower ranks of the Royal Navy personnel. Much space is devoted to building up a picture of her. She appears as a woman of exceptional goodness, loyalty and generosity, with a great fascination for men, though she is not beautiful. Illustrations of these qualities are given at some length. When her customers have no money, she tells them that they can pay her when they get home: 'I know you won't *let me suffer*.' (The words look like one of Kipling's verbal pointers. I think they are meant to be: one of her customers, Vickery, does make her suffer in a much more

¹ See below, p. 138.

serious way than by failing to pay for his drinks.) She once entrusted her gold watch to a bosun who had forgotten his. She puts a set of bottles of Pritchard's favourite beer aside for him, tying them up with her hair-ribbon, and when he comes back four years later she at once recognizes him and produces the bottles.¹

She is described as a person who 'never scrupled to feed a lame duck or set her foot on a scorpion'. The two sailors who tell us all this, and whose somewhat hard-boiled opinion of women in general we have just heard, admire her greatly, and refuse to believe that she could ever have done anything reprehensible. If anything went wrong between her and Vickery, they repeatedly affirm, the fault cannot possibly have been hers.

Pyecroft then goes on to tell what he saw of Vickery just before he deserted. The latter takes him to a circus performance at Cape Town, which includes a four minute show of the newly invented cinematograph. The reel consists of a number of scenes from London, and one of them shows a crowd of passengers coming out of a train at Paddington. One of the crowd is Mrs Bathurst. It is made clear that Vickery goes to see this film every night, and that he has brought Pyecroft with him in order to make sure that the woman is really Mrs Bathurst, and not a hallucination. When Pyecroft remarks that she seems to look for somebody, he replies: 'She is looking for me!' and works himself into a fit of uncontrollable rage, even

¹ In order not to omit what might possibly be taken by others as a counter-clue, I mention that Mrs Bathurst is described as a young widow. I do not, however, think this is meant as a clue: it is only part of the characterization, in telling us that she is an experienced woman who can take care of herself among the amorous sailormen who frequent her bar.

threatening to murder Pyecroft, because he takes his remark as an attempt to pump him.

His reactions to the picture are very strange: he is obviously in the extremes of terror, and when the film show is over he takes his companion on a pub crawl trying in vain to get dead drunk. He intimates to Pyecroft that he has committed some terrible sin, and later on he tells him: 'I am not a murderer, because my lawful wife died in childbed six weeks after I came out. That much at least I am clear of.' (Again, one suspects one of Kipling's pointers: why 'lawful'? Is there another woman whom he regards as his wife, and who is not a lawful one?)

A few days later, Vickery has an interview with his Captain. At the end of it, the latter comes out of his cabin wearing 'his court-martial face', but after a visit ashore he returns looking like his usual self. We learn that he is sending Vickery on a journey to Bloemfontein to dispatch some ammunition. After having duly performed this task, Vickery deserts and vanishes into the blue.

Early in the story inspector Hooper has told the narrator that he has brought a souvenir back from a recent journey to Rhodesia, and during Pyecroft's recital he continues to finger his waistcoat pocket. He asks the two sailors questions about Vickery, which they resent, because they think he is trying to get information for the police. It is Hooper who provides the conclusion of Vickery's story: in Rhodesia he has been told to keep a look-out for two tramps who have been seen on the railway line. He finds their bodies in a teak forest; they are completely charred by a stroke of lightning, and fall to pieces when they are moved, but one of them is identifiable as Vickery by his false teeth and his tattoo marks.

Hooper refrains from producing the teeth, which, we gather, are the 'souvenir' he talked about.

Thus we get the highly effective device that the end of the story is implicit in its beginning, but kept in suspense till the last.

So much for the synopsis. It will be seen that there are a number of questions to which one must have the answers if the story is to be at all comprehensible: what were the relations of Vickery and Mrs Bathurst? What was the terrible sin that Vickery committed, and that we were told was not murder? Why was he so terrified by the film? How is it that the film can show Mrs Bathurst in London, when she is supposed to be in New Zealand? What was Vickery doing in the wilds of Rhodesia, on his way to the Zambesi, where in 1904 he could not possibly hope to see the film? As long as we do not know—or guess—the answers to these riddles, the story is like a jigsaw puzzle with so many pieces missing that it cannot be put together to form a recognizable picture.

I am convinced that in order to find the meaning of *Mrs Bathurst* one must start from the film episode. If its full implications are realized, it comes out as the most original and striking idea of the tale. It contains most of the information necessary for an understanding of the latter, and I should not be surprised to learn that for Kipling it was the point round which he built the whole story.

It is easy to miss something here, because after sixty years we have most of us ceased to feel that there is anything very wonderful in the fact that a film can show us people at the other end of the world, or even people who are not in the world any more. I shall come back to the latter point, but for the moment I would stress that this cannot have been the way people felt about the cinema in

1904. To them, its possibilities must have seemed little short of marvellous, and in this story we see Kipling, with his usual originality, seizing on this and working out its implications for his own art, as he did with another new invention in *Wireless*.

I spoke above of the information about the characters of the story that can be gleaned from its film motif. This information is: that Mrs Bathurst has left New Zealand for London (this must be fairly recently, as Pyecroft says the episode of the beer bottles was 'in 1901, mark you'). Further that she is looking for Vickery. Besides serving a symbolical purpose (to which I shall return below), I believe that this must be taken quite literally: she has come to London to find him. One notes that the picture shows her arriving at Paddington Station by the Western Mail Train. Such details often convey something of importance in Kipling; in this case it tells us that she has just landed in one of the western ports.

And furthermore, if one reads Pyecroft's description of the film carefully, it tells us something of the utmost importance for the understanding of the story; it gives us the missing piece that makes the jigsaw puzzle come out as a meaningful picture, viz. *that Mrs Bathurst is dead* when Vickery and Pyecroft see her on the screen.

When one's attention has been called to this by the description of the picture, one even realizes that it can be deduced from the facts we already know from the story. For we have been pointedly told that Vickery's wife has recently died in childbed, and that he has only a short time to wait before he is pensioned off, when there would be nothing to prevent him from going to New Zealand or London or wherever Mrs Bathurst might be. This information must be meant to tell us that he is now a free man.

(Kipling calls attention to this by making Pyecroft say: 'if what 'e said about 'is wife was true he was a free man as 'e stood'.) There would then be nothing to prevent him from marrying Mrs Bathurst, *if she were still alive*, in which case the wrong he did her would presumably be expiated, and their love affair brought to a quite prosaic conclusion. There would be no need for him to torture himself by seeing her picture every night, nor for their death in the thunderstorm.

But apart from the above, the description of Vickery and Pyecroft at the cinema show contains two indications that it is a dead woman they see on the screen. The first is Vickery's reaction to the sight, which is that of a haunted man. But it is also indicated symbolically—and I think unmistakably—in the account of the film itself. In this we are first told that 'when anyone came down too far towards us that was watchin' they walked out of the picture, so to speak'. If this were meant merely as a piece of description, there is no need that it should be repeated. In fact, it is hardly an exaggeration to say that there are *no* gratuitous repetitions in the stories in Kipling's late manner. But it *is* repeated some ten lines further down, and amplified in a way that, according to his usual practice of indirect communication, seems to mean something: when Mrs Bathurst appears among the crowd coming out of the train, Pyecroft says: 'She walked on and on till she melted out of the picture—like—like a shadow jumpin' over a candle.' (The word 'shadow', with its significant overtones, and also 'candle' ('the candle of life') again look like verbal pointers.)

And by telling us that Mrs Bathurst is dead, the film motif also gives us the clue to one of the other enigmas of the story: what was the sin that Vickery had committed?

Clearly, it had some connection with her. What then was the meaning of his confidence to Pyecroft: 'I am not a murderer, because my lawful wife died in childbed six weeks after I came out. That much at least I am clear of.'

For one thing, of course, he is telling Pyecroft that he has an alibi as far as his wife's death is concerned. But it also tells us other things. Why this insistence on his alibi for his wife's death, when there is no mention that anybody thought he had been guilty of it? It looks as if he had been tempted to do away with her, though he did not do so, and for what other purpose than to marry another woman? (In 1904, and even today, it would have been impossible for him to get a divorce.)

But the most important fact it conveys to us is that until he came out to South Africa he maintained marital relations with his wife, and that she was expecting a baby when Mrs Bathurst came to London to find him. And this would, for a respectable man like Vickery, be a valid reason—or excuse—to tell her he could not leave his wife for her.

'I am not a murderer.' But a man who causes the death of a woman by driving her to take her own life or to die of a broken heart is not technically a murderer, though his guilt may be as heavy as if he were. And this I believe is what Vickery did. I think the clues we have examined put us in a position to answer the question: what was Vickery's guilt, and what happened to Mrs Bathurst after the story left her at her hotel at Hauraki?

The following is an attempt to make explicit what Kipling expected us to guess from the clues he planted in the story. It is slightly embarrassing thus to amplify something that he only hinted at, and to resort to a matter-of-fact account that he did not want to give himself, but it has

to be done if one wants to interpret the story. This, then, is what I suppose to have happened:

Like the other two sailors, Vickery came to New Zealand, where he met Mrs Bathurst at her hotel. They had a love affair. Once she had fallen for him she was completely obsessed by her love for him, as a woman of her generous habit of giving all she had would be. Hence the attitude to her many sailor admirers described earlier in the book; the easy and tolerant way in which she fended off their approaches, which she could afford because her affections were so completely centred on another man. Hence, perhaps, also the 'blindish look' twice attributed to her.

The wrong that Vickery did her was that he did not tell her that he had a wife, and allowed her to believe that he would marry her. Some time after 1901 (when Pritchard last saw her in New Zealand) she went to London to join him. At that time, Vickery was still living with his wife, for, as we have already been told, she died in childbed six weeks after he came out to South Africa. Published early in 1904, the story must have been written some time before. It takes place after the Boer War ended in May 1902, as otherwise Vickery could not have wandered about the country as he did; but not long after, as evidenced by the ammunition which he was sent to dispatch from Bloemfontein—there would not be naval ammunition there in peace-time. That Kipling took pains to indicate dates (for the beer-bottle incident and Mrs Vickery's death) that would be irrelevant if not meant as clues is surely significant.

Mrs Bathurst has thus come from the other end of the world to find her lover. As the film shows her, she has just arrived and is literally looking for him. She finds him,

and now learns for the first time that he is a married man, and that his wife is expecting a baby, and finds that he refuses to break up his marriage. The earlier reference to his fifteen-year-old daughter is another piece of information contributing to show the strength of his domestic ties. What we have already learnt about Vickery indicates that this is how he would react in such a crisis: a stolid and prosaic person, punctilious about his duties and ambitious to be 'genteel', a conformer, not a man likely to take a step that would present him in a disreputable light. Realizing how she has been betrayed (and being the sort of woman who would anyhow refuse to steal another woman's husband) she kills herself, or dies of grief and humiliation.

It was said before that the film theme is the central one of the story. Kipling seized upon certain aspects of the new invention, viz. that a film could show, not only people in a distant country, but people who had died since it was photographed, and he used this to give a new twist to an old theme: *the haunting of a murderer by his victim*. This is what Vickery experiences in the cinema: he believes the dead woman is 'looking for him' again, in another and more sinister sense. The reason why he feels compelled to see the film every night is thus not that he cannot bear to miss one glimpse of a woman he loves, but the same compulsion that drives a murderer to revisit the scene of his crime. The ordeal of doing this is almost too horrible to be borne. He perspires with terror, and his face is 'white and crumply' like that of a foetus. In short, *Mrs Bathurst* is primarily *the story of a haunting*.

One minor point remains to be cleared up before coming to the end of the story, if only to leave no loose ends: What is the meaning of the episode of Vickery's

interview (cf. p. 132) with his Captain? Why does the Captain wear his 'court-martial face' after listening to Vickery? And what happened during his visit ashore to make his anger, or anxiety, subside? Clearly, Vickery must have told him something that shocked him deeply, and afterwards something must have happened during the Captain's visit ashore to relieve his mind. The way Kipling elaborates the episode leaves no doubt that it is meant to be significant.

I think what he wants us to read between the lines can only be this: Vickery told the Captain that he was afraid of going mad, and that he would go completely out of his mind and commit some desperate act if he could no longer satisfy his compulsive urge to see Mrs Bathurst on the film. This is supported by two earlier clues: Pyecroft talks at some length about sailors who go mad, and in a scene between him and Vickery the latter becomes so furious at what he takes to be an attempt to worm out the secret of his guilt that he threatens to murder him.

Like a good officer, who has the welfare of his men at heart, the Captain is distressed and alarmed at Vickery's confession, but does not know what to do about it. When however he goes ashore, he consults the Admiral (whose headquarters are mentioned a little further on, as if to lead the reader in the right direction), and the latter authorizes him to send Vickery to Bloemfontein. That it is an unorthodox procedure to let him travel alone, is emphasized by Pritchard's surprise when he hears about it. Thus a solution is found to enable Vickery to see the picture again, and he tells Pyecroft that this is indeed what he intends to do.

This may be the place to deal with the puzzling Boy Niven episode told by the sailors early in the story. Boy

Niven induced a group of bluejackets to desert to an uninhabited island near Vancouver, telling them that an uncle of his had a farm there and that he was 'compelled by the law of the land' to give them a farm too, and keeping them walking in circles till they end up at their starting point. The episode has no immediate relevance to the rest of the story. It looks like a pure digression. But real digressions are practically unknown in Kipling's late manner. Mr Elliot Gilbert has shown in his above-mentioned paper that it very aptly symbolizes the haphazardness of fate which forms an underlying thematic structure in *Mrs Bathurst*. In the present context the question is whether the Boy Niven episode has any connection with the plot of the story. I think it may have. It is part of Kipling's method in the tales in his late manner sometimes to indicate connections within the story by phrases and themes that form a kind of cross reference to other passages. Mr Gilbert has called attention to one of these: the 'heavy thunder and squalls' that the deserters get when they are brought back to their ship, foreshadowing the thunderstorm in which Vickery perishes. One wonders if there may not be more. The deserters come to the island to seek the fulfilment of an empty promise, made by a liar, as Mrs Bathurst did when she came to London. Pyecroft says: 'But we believed him', and repeats this a little later. Mrs Bathurst believed Vickery's false promises. And there is Pyecroft's phrase that the deserters were 'loving and trustful to a degree'—an odd one coming from a hard-bitten sailor about a ship's boy. In short, the Boy Niven episode looks like an example of the 'overture device' that Kipling was later on to use in *The Bull That Thought*: that of an introductory playing through of themes from the story.

And what of the conclusion of the story: the two charred bodies in the teak forest? I believe that Dr Tompkins' theory¹ that the other body is that of Mrs Bathurst is true²—in a way. For if the theory is to be accepted literally, it raises a number of new enigmatic points: how did Mrs Bathurst get to Africa? If she did, why did she not meet Vickery at Cape Town, where the liners come in, instead of in a remote part of the country like Rhodesia? How could she find him there, seeing that he had disappeared without leaving a trace? Why was she dressed as a tramp? And anyway, if the present interpretation is correct, she was *dead*. But, paradoxically, if she was dead, that solves all these difficulties: it is hard to see how Kipling could transport a live woman to a Rhodesian forest and get her dressed up as a tramp—at least he could not very well do it without telling us how it was done—but he could do what he liked with a *ghost*.

¹ Op. cit., p. 90.

² A pointer to her explanation is found in one of the last passages of the story after the account of the finding of the two charred bodies: 'Pritchard covered his face with his hands, like a child shutting out an ugliness. "And to think of her at Hauraki!" he murmured—"with 'er 'air-ribbon on my beer . . . Oh, my Gawd!"' Pritchard thus takes it for granted that one of the bodies is Mrs Bathurst's. But the matter is really clinched by the song heard in the background in the last lines of the story:

On a summer afternoon, when the honeysuckle blooms,
And all Nature seems at rest,
Underneath the bower, 'mid the perfume of the flower
Sat a maiden with the one she loves the best.

This is clearly meant as an ironic curtain for the tale, where the 'bower' was a tropical wilderness, and the maiden and her lover two charred corpses. The point was first made by Lt.-Col. B. S. Browne in no. 132 of the *Kipling Journal*. I am indebted to Dr Tompkins for calling my attention to it, and to the above-mentioned speech of Pritchard's.

I believe that the end of the story is meant to embody a motif that Kipling was many years later to elaborate in *A Madonna of the Trenches*: that of love victorious over death. Like Sergeant Godsoe and Aunt Armine in the latter story, Vickery and Mrs Bathurst were to meet after death, in this case at the moment of Vickery's death. And this is indeed almost the only ending one can think of that is appropriate to the story if the present interpretation is correct. We must bear in mind the emphasis placed on Mrs Bathurst's loyalty and generosity. It is, I think, meant to prepare the way for the idea that, in spite of Vickery's betrayal, she forgives him and seeks the union with him after death that was denied her in life.¹

¹ Taking what appears to be a clue from the passage 'she never scrupled to feed a lame duck or set her foot on a scorpion', I at one time believed that Mrs Bathurst's role was meant to be that of an Avenging Fury, first pursuing him in the shape of her picture on the film, and then up through Africa, until she overtakes him and destroys him. Most of the clues used for the present interpretation would in fact fit the other one too, and in this there is nothing surprising, seeing that the 'Avenging Fury' interpretation is only a variant of the present one. But I have come to the conclusion that the one offered here is to be preferred, because it is more in keeping with what we know of Mrs Bathurst's character—her generosity and her goodness, that make her something of a protective Mother Figure—and also because the idea of an all-forgiving woman, who pardons her 'murderer' rather than sending him to damnation, seems to me more in keeping with the whole tenor of the story. In fact, to have concentrated too much on the traditional aspects of haunting would have made the story too much like *Le Fanu*, and too little like Kipling.

In *Something of Myself* he tells us that he actually overheard the sentence about 'setting her foot on a scorpion' in a conversation between two sailors, and that the phrase started him on the tale. It is thus not one of the 'contrived' clues planted in the text, and may perhaps be taken as merely part of the description of Mrs Bathurst's personality.

But in carrying through this motif, it is obvious that Kipling must have come up against a technical difficulty: hitherto the story has evolved on a realistic as well as on a symbolic level, and the events are such as might conceivably happen in real life. But as Mrs Bathurst is dead, and only her shade can be brought on the scene, he is forced either to give the story an openly supernatural ending, which would not go very well with the rest of it,¹ or he must somehow contrive to join the flats of the realistic and the symbolic levels.

The part of the story in question must therefore be composed in such a way that one can read both a natural and a supernatural explanation into the final scene, or rather the latter must be kept wavering between the two. This is a very delicate operation, and its difficulty may well be the cause of the increasing obscurity of the narrative as it moves towards its conclusion, for from now on nothing can be told explicitly, and the writer has to proceed by hints and the sort of communication effected by symbols.

Before going on, I would point out that the persons for whom Hooper is told to look out are described by his Rhodesian colleague as 'a couple of tramps', while later Hooper refers to one of them as the other's 'mate'. It is

¹ Kipling was not very partial to supernatural explanations of the events he narrates. One of the very few exceptions is *A Madonna of the Trenches*, whose theme I believe is a variant of that of *Mrs Bathurst*, and of whose action it would in fact be impossible to give a natural explanation. But in that story the way is prepared for the supernatural ending by the nightmare picture of the front line that is gradually built up, with its decaying corpses dangling on the wire and the frozen dead in the trench that creak like leather when you step on them. This is a no-man's-land between life and death, where there is nothing artistically shocking in the idea that the borderline between them can be crossed both ways.

easily overlooked that the two words may at a pinch be applied to a woman, though the inspector no doubt thinks they are men, and Pyecroft first receives the same impression listening to Hooper's narrative. This may be taken as part of the 'wavering' technique referred to above. Nor is it anywhere said explicitly that the two tramps travel together—from an artistic point of view it would be much more satisfactory if they met in the forest as the storm breaks.

While the interpretation up to this point can be based on clues which Kipling seems to have expected the attentive reader to grasp, we are on less sure ground as regards the end of the story. Here, the interpreter must resort to a certain amount of guesswork, for the simple reason that (if the above theory is correct) Kipling did not *want* to give clues of the kind that would make the meaning too obvious.

It is of course impossible to reconstruct the complete 'scenario' that Kipling had in mind, and of which he could only show a few glimpses because he wanted to avoid committing himself to any explanation explicit enough to be unambiguously supernatural or natural. The whole thing had to be done by hints and suggestions; it had to be made ambivalent, and the glimpses allowed the reader had to be brief, fragmentary and flickering—like an early cinematographic film, to borrow Dr Tompkins' simile. In fact, it would not be unlike Kipling actually to have *imitated* this cinematographic effect, seeing what a central place the film theme occupies in the story.

In the result, it is *the reader* who will have to make a choice between the natural¹ and the supernatural reading,

¹ For those who choose to adopt the view that Mrs Bathurst is alive, the natural explanation would involve some sort of answer to

by means of the fragments of the 'scenario' offered to him. He will have to proceed on the principle of Pyecroft's speech earlier in the story: 'I used to think seein' and hearin' was the only regulation aids to ascertainin' facts, but as we get older we get more accommodatin'.'

As for the complete 'scenario', one would have to be a clairvoyant to make more than a rough guess, but I think it may have been something like the following:

The second tramp is, on the supernatural level, Mrs Bathurst's ghost, and I believe that is the impression that Kipling wants to convey. (One notes that in the first printed version, that of the *Windsor Magazine*, an illustration unmistakably represents the second tramp as a woman—cf. below.) If the flickering light shows the reader another version of the death scene, viz. that, though the other tramp is a real tramp, Mrs Bathurst's ghost takes possession of his body as his soul leaves it, that will do as well.

That the second tramp must be, or in some way represents, Mrs Bathurst seems to me the only artistically satisfactory explanation: it would be pointless, and unlike Kipling, to introduce an anonymous tramp, of whom one has heard nothing before and who has no discoverable function in the tale, when Vickery might just as well have been made to meet his death alone.

There may also be an idea of *pursuit*, which would give

the question how Mrs Bathurst got to Africa, and how she came to be dressed as a tramp, etc. For those who, like the present writer, believe that she is dead, the only natural explanation would seem to be that the tramp is a real tramp, but that Vickery has a hallucination in which he believes that the tramp is Mrs Bathurst's ghost. I am, however, convinced that Kipling saw the end of the story as a supernatural event.

a particularly dramatic and sinister turn to the Vickery-Bathurst motif, and also account for Vickery's flight further and further north: either he is afraid to die, as he would have to in order to be united with the dead woman, like Sergeant Godsoe in *A Madonna of the Trenches*, and this is in keeping with what has been intimated about his character. Or he believes that Mrs Bathurst's ghost is an avenging spirit pursuing him in order to call him to account. Turning back to Pyecroft's account of the film, every detail of which is apparently meant to be significant, one is arrested by the insistence on the way in which Mrs Bathurst walks out of the screen: after Vickery has passed beyond the inhabited places¹ where he could satisfy his compulsion to see her nightly at the show, perhaps he believes that she has actually stepped out of the picture, and is pursuing him in an even more menacing way than compelling him to submit to the torture of watching her on the film. Perhaps one of the reasons why he had to see the picture every night was to make sure that this had not happened yet.

But, however that may be, she overtakes him in the end, and as he dies he knows that his betrayal is forgiven. For her charred body is kneeling before him, and her face is turned upwards towards his in adoration—this, I take it, is what Kipling wants us to sense behind the prosaic description of the railwayman to the effect that

¹ In their conversation about deserters, the sailors mention one who tried to get to Lake Nyassa in Central Africa in the hope of getting a job on the flotilla there. If this has any bearing on Vickery, I suppose it can only be that in his half-crazy state he conceives the idea that if he gets sufficiently far away Mrs Bathurst's ghost may not be able to find him. No motive is indicated why he should want a job on the flotilla.

she is 'squatting before him and watching him'. (One notes that elsewhere, for example in *A Madonna of the Trenches*, Kipling obtains a subtle effect by reporting an event through a character who does not quite understand what he has witnessed.)

The account of the finding of the bodies ends with an obviously symbolic passage. Though both bodies crumble into ash, Vickery's false teeth (of which we have heard so much earlier in the story) are intact, and his tattoo-marks are clearly visible 'as writing shows up white on a burned letter'. The marks are a crown and a foul anchor with the initials M.V. A foul anchor means, among other things, an emblematic anchor with a piece of the cable loosely wound about it. Thus, Vickery's body and its frailties have been destroyed by the purifying fire of all-forgiving love, and the falsity symbolized by his badly made false teeth has been sifted away from his dust. The tattoo-mark is still visible, but its foul anchor has turned white. The anchor symbolizes steadfastness and fidelity; the mark was a lie when he lived—that it has turned white like the writing on a burned letter signifies a message that the lie is now forgiven.

Most people who ponder *Mrs Bathurst* seem to take it for granted that it is Vickery that is possessed by Aphrodite and destroyed by Love, while Mrs Bathurst is assigned the role of his unwilling destroyer. I wonder why. It appears to me that Kipling has gone out of his way to tell us that Mrs Bathurst is the born victim of love, and that with her unbounded generosity and loyalty, not to mention her motherliness, she is the very type of woman to throw herself away on an unworthy object and to sacrifice herself completely for a man once she has fallen deeply in love with him, with the same openhanded-

ness as that with which she gave her gold watch to the sailor.

In the present interpretation the above-mentioned roles are reversed. I think that what I regard as an erroneous distribution of the roles may, at least partly, be due to a mistaken reading of two clues. One is the remark about the deserter: 'It takes them at all ages'. But that does not refer to Vickery, but to another man, and anyway it is just as applicable to her as to him. The other is that a man who 'gets struck with' a woman like Mrs Bathurst 'goes crazy—or just saves himself' (my italics). The second part of the sentence is surely as significant as the first: Vickery was the sort of man who saved himself. That he was destroyed in spite of his playing for safety is part of the moral of the story: he that risks his life shall save it, and he that saves it shall lose it.

It is true that the characterization of Vickery as a prosaic person is part of the theme of the unpredictable ways of love. But surely this theme is even better illustrated by making an attractive woman fall in love with a dull man than by making a dull man fall in love with an attractive woman.

And finally we have a piece of external evidence about the roles of the two characters. It is from Kipling himself. In *Something of Myself* (p. 101) he tells us the following:

All I carried away from the magic town of Auckland was the face and voice of a woman who sold me beer at a little hotel there. They stayed at the back of my head till ten years later when, in a local train of the Cape Town suburbs, I heard a petty officer from Simons Town telling a companion about a woman in New Zealand who 'never scrupled to help a lame duck or put her foot on a scorpion'. Those words gave me the key to the face and voice at Auckland, and the tale called

'Mrs Bathurst' slid into my mind, smoothly and orderly as floating timber on a bank-high river.

The story thus started from Mrs Bathurst, whom he must have conceived as its principal character, and whose name he used as its title. And as the fundamental motif of the tale is that of obsessional love, and the principal character would normally be the one to embody the fundamental motif, the passage at least makes it likely that she was the one that Aphrodite took possession of.

Another clue that might lead one astray is the Elizabethan pastiche called *From Lyden's 'Irenius'* which precedes the story. Like the poems that usually occupy this position, it must be expected to play a variation on the idea of the story itself, and this, in fact, it does. The chief point it makes is that destructive love does not respect rank, and this is expressed in a blank verse passage where its victims are a King and a clown. The word 'clown' might be taken by the reader to point to Vickery, rather than Mrs Bathurst, as the one possessed by the destructive passion. But to read this into the passage would be like concluding from Keats' line about the nightingale 'heard by Emperor and clown' that the bird was inaudible to the female sex. The meaning of the *Irenius* passage is obviously only that the victim may be a person without the glamour of superior rank, and it thus fits both Mrs Bathurst and Vickery. Actually, they are *both* destroyed, she by her own great love, and he by being the object of it.

The *Irenius* fragment contains two further passages relevant to the story. One is: 'She that damned him to death knew not that she did it, or would have died ere she had done it. For she loved him.' (*Ere* would normally be taken to mean 'rather than', but it is perhaps significant

that it may also mean 'before', thus carrying overtones hinting that she was *dead* before she destroyed her lover.) This, it will be seen, is perfectly in keeping with the present interpretation: if we take 'ere' in its most obvious sense, the Irenius passage means: Mrs Bathurst loved Vickery, but if she had known that her love would damn him—one notes the overtones of 'damn', suggesting that he is not only killed by her love, but brought by it to commit a sin for which Hell is a fit punishment—she would never have shown him that she loved him. The second passage runs: 'at the end (he) threw his life from him for a little sleep'. This too fits the interpretation: Love has made life such a Hell for him that death came as a relief.

One thing remains to be dealt with. *Mrs Bathurst* was first published in the *Windsor Magazine* for September 1904 before it was printed in *Traffics and Discoveries* later in the same year. In the short interval between the two, Kipling revised the text.

The possibility that the *Traffics and Discoveries* version wholly represents Kipling's original manuscript, and that every deviation from *Traffics and Discoveries* in the *Windsor Magazine* must be due to an outside hand, can be dismissed. For some of the *Windsor* variants are concerned with small points of style that no magazine editor could be expected to meddle with, and the corresponding passages in the final version are sometimes improvements that bear the mark of Kipling's hand. He must then have revised his original manuscript text slightly when he prepared the *Traffics and Discoveries* text. (This, incidentally, is one of the proofs that the obscurities cannot be due to careless drafting.) Nevertheless, it will be seen below that

the *Windsor* text contains a few variants which can hardly be ascribed to Kipling, but must have been made by, or demanded by, the editor of the magazine. The two texts diverge on sixty-odd points, but the differences are without exception of minor importance: it can be said at once that none of them affects the plot or has any bearing on the interpretation.

The majority of the changes in the final text are stylistic improvements, as when 'the yellow rocks' is altered to 'the piled rocks', and 'the sun' to 'the assured sun'. 'Bristling all over' is altered to 'crimsoning rapidly'. 'They (the films) are the very thing itself' becomes 'are taken from the very thing itself', and 'she (the railway engine) ran so lifelike' is altered to 'she headed so straight'. A good many of them serve the purpose of making Pyecroft's speeches more in character, and the motif of the false teeth in Hooper's pocket is emphasized by one additional mention.

Others are corrections of misprints or slips. Thus the name 'Barnato' is given its correct form 'Barnado'. The first mention of the nickname 'Click' is deleted, because it makes nonsense of a later passage which presupposes that the identity of the man in question has not yet been revealed. In the *Windsor* version, Vickery is described as 'a genteelly 'alf-bred beggar'—an obvious misprint, which is corrected into 'a genteelly spoken 'alf-bred beggar'.

One curious feature of the *Windsor* text is that it suppresses (the word is surely the right one) all the not very numerous references to birth and sexual intercourse found in the final version. Besides throwing light on the taboos which a popular magazine was expected to observe at the time, one of these variants in the *Windsor* text has a

deceptive air of affecting a clue of some importance for the interpretation. An examination of all the suppressions in question shows however that this is not the case. The passage where Pyecroft attempts to describe the unique quality of Mrs Bathurst's personality runs in the final version as follows: he first asks Pritchard: 'How many women have you been *intimate with* all over the world?' In the magazine version, this runs: 'How many women have you been *affectionate* with . . .?' Pyecroft goes on to say: '. . . most of 'em you can *live with* a month on end, an' next commission you'd be put to it to certify *whether they talked in their sleep or not*'. This becomes in the magazine version: '. . . most of 'em you can *know* for a month on end, an' next commission you'd be sore put to it to certify *whether they were black or white*'. In the passage where Pyecroft describes what Vickery's face looks like while he watches the film show, he likens it to 'those things in bottles in those herbalistic shops at Plymouth—preserved in spirits of wine. White an' crumply things—*previous to birth as you might say*'. The italicized words are left out in the magazine version.

This brings us to the passage referred to above where the magazine text might be read as indicating some real difference of meaning from that of the final version. In the latter, Vickery says that his wife *died in childbed* six weeks after he came out, but in the *Windsor Magazine* he says that she '*died in 'er bed*'. The wording is odd in itself—after all, most women die in their beds, and there seems no particular reason to mention it explicitly in the case of Mrs Vickery. But in the light of the above it is seen that it means nothing at all: it is merely a consequence of the principle adopted by the magazine editor of suppressing all references to human reproduction. Incidentally, it

would be interesting to know who was ultimately responsible for these bowdlerisms. Did the editor correct the text on his own, or did he really obtain the author's permission to do so? There are some indications that the former was the case: the alterations look as if they have been done in the proofs, by somebody who was at pains to avoid overrunning the lines where it could be done. This seems to be the case for example with the alteration of 'intimate with' to 'affectionate with', where the result is so inept that it is difficult to believe that Kipling could be responsible for it. But however this may be, the fact remains that he restored the original wording in the final text.

The illustrations in the *Windsor Magazine* cannot be dismissed without examining them, seeing that they may possibly have been approved by Kipling, and that it would at any rate seem improbable that they would be allowed to run counter to the plot as he conceived it. The question is: do they contain clues to the understanding of the plot, in the same way as the cover design for *Edwin Drood*? They are signed Victor Prout. They are in the usual magazine style of the period, and not on a very high artistic level, though one of them—Vickery and Pycroft walking in the dark after the film show—does succeed in catching the eerie atmosphere of the scene. The only one that appears to have any bearing on the interpretation represents the finding of the two dead bodies in the forest.

The drawing has some peculiar features. Hooper is shown on the left, dramatically registering surprise and horror. Vickery is standing up stiffly against a wooden barrier that marks the ending of the railway siding. He is seen against the light so that he is outlined in almost complete blackness. His features, including his false teeth, are

invisible, but the tattoo marks show up white in the opening of his shirt. A figure, which is unmistakably a woman, is sitting between the rails before him, shading her eyes with one hand as if dazzled, and stretching out her other arm towards him with the fingers spread, in a gesture that may express either horror at what she sees, or fear for him, or an instinctive movement to ward off her own fate.

They have both managed to be completely charred without any damage to their clothing, down to the folds of Vickery's baggy trousers and their wide-brimmed felt hats. This must presumably be put down to the high standard of decency that the *Windsor Magazine* was concerned to maintain. The posture of the woman is very odd. It is that of a living woman: no one who did not know the story would guess that she was dead, let alone that she was charred to the point of crumbling into ashes when her body was moved. The outstretched arm, the spread fingers, and the graceful feminine pose of the body are quite impossible for a burnt-out corpse. As the story is too explicit on this point for Prout to have believed that the figure he was to draw was meant to be alive, I can only think of two explanations: either the editor (or Prout) decided that the readers of the magazine were as averse to seeing the picture of a dead body as to being reminded of the facts of life, or Prout did not know how to draw one.

In any case, the picture can be dismissed as devoid of evidential value, except for the important fact that it shows that the second tramp is a woman, for it is unlikely that the artist should have been allowed to misrepresent Kipling's intentions in that respect.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FORGOTTEN CATCHWORD

THE COMPREHENSION OF PRIVATE COPPER

The Comprehension of Private Copper describes an episode during the Boer War. It was first published in 1902. It is not one of Kipling's best stories, and it is usually passed over, or only very briefly commented on, by critics. It is a piece of polemics rather than a story in the ordinary sense of the word. But it contains some curious features that to my knowledge nobody has ever tried to explain. For one thing, it has the appearance of being very badly put together, in a way that seems quite uncharacteristic of Kipling, containing what looks like a long digression that appears totally irrelevant to the subject. The meaning of its title is obscure. The present chapter attempts to show that this apparent digression, so far from being irrelevant, forms an integral part of the story, and in fact contains its real meaning.

It may be well to begin by recapitulating the story:

Private Copper, in civilian life a Sussex shepherd, is on reconnaissance and is held up by a Boer. His captor tells him that he is really of English descent, but that he has come to hate England because of what happened to his father. The latter settled down in the Transvaal after the First Annexation, trusting to the promise that 'as long as the sun rose and the rivers ran in their courses the Transvaal would belong to England'. (The reference is to Sir Garnet Wolseley's speech at Wakkerstroom, October 1879.) When Gladstone restored the independence of the

Republic after the British defeat at Majuba, nothing was done to protect him, and he was victimized by the Boers. For eight years life was made hell for him and his family. 'My father, he lost everything—everything down to his self-respect'—until at last, 'cheated by your bitch of a country, he found out who was the upper dog in South Africa'. (Kipling is here repeating one of the stock criticisms of Liberal policy in South Africa.)

The renegade is not an attractive type. He is arrogant, self-assertive, grievance-ridden, vindictive and brutal. (He promises Copper that he will have him flogged when he brings him back to the Boer camp.) He is over-voluble, excitable, unbalanced and is obviously suffering from an inferiority complex. Later on in the story, when he is taken away as a prisoner-of-war, he has a hysterical fit and screams at the top of his voice. In the scene in the British camp, where the soldiers treat the atrocity stories of a pro-Boer paper as a joke, he is completely bewildered by their behaviour. Clearly, the point that Kipling is at pains to make here is that, in spite of his English descent, the renegade is as unlike an Englishman as it is possible to be—a fact of some importance for the understanding of the real meaning of the story, as will appear below. Nor is he at all like a Boer, as Kipling describes them in his South African poems and stories. This is no doubt what he intends to convey by the very first thing we are told about the renegade: that he wears 'an obviously ready-made suit of grey tweed'. The passage is characteristic of Kipling's verbal economy, making its point in less than one line: the Boers wore broadcloth. The passage may also be intended as a preliminary hint at the Eurasian motif:¹ in his Indian stories the Eurasians are described as

¹ See below, p. 158.

cheap imitations of Sahibs; and in 1902 no pukka gentleman wore ready-made clothes. Of the qualities popularly ascribed to the Boers in England at the time, he shares in fact only the two most unpleasant ones: a fondness for using the shambok and a contempt for black people. In short, he is an illustration of the degrading effect of being forced to give up one's cultural allegiance and to conform to that of one's masters.

To resume the story: the renegade goes on to express his contempt for the English, with quotations from an English pro-Boer paper that he carries in his pocket:

'It took us about twenty years to find out how rotten you were. *We* know, and you know it now. Your Army—it is the laughing stock of the Continent. . . . Look at what your own working classes, the diseased, lying, drinking white stuff that you come out of, are saying.' He thrust the English weekly, doubled at the leading article, on Copper's knee. 'See what dirty dogs your masters are. They do not even back you in your dirty work. . . . You daren't touch our loyal people in Cape Town! Your masters won't let you.'¹

At the end of this harangue Copper catches the renegade off his guard and knocks him out. He brings him back to his unit, and the other soldiers hilariously read aloud from his pro-Boer paper 'excerpts of the speeches of the accredited leaders of His Majesty's opposition' accusing the British troops of atrocities. The prisoner is bewildered by their behaviour, and their Canadian sergeant tells him that if it comes to that the Canadians do not understand them either. This is, of course, a resumption of one of Kipling's favourite themes: that the English national

¹ Readers of the articles Kipling wrote from Cape Town during the war, e.g. *The Sin of Witchcraft*, will have noticed that some of the renegade's opinions are shared by him.

character is incomprehensible to people of other nationalities, while as far as the renegade is concerned it is meant to indicate the extent to which he has become spiritually a foreigner.

So much for the story itself. But there is another theme, which is given considerable prominence, but which at the first glance does not seem to have any connection with the rest: that of the renegade looking and speaking like a Eurasian.

It is first introduced as a mere hint immediately after Copper has been held up by him:

The dark-skinned, dark-haired, and dark-eyed stranger was his first intimate enemy. He spoke, allowing for a clipped cadence that recalled to Copper vague memories of Umballa, in precisely the same offensive accent that the young squire of Wilmington¹ had used fifteen years ago when he caught and kicked Alf Copper, a rabbit in each pocket, out of the ditches of Cuckmere.

A little later, when the renegade calls Copper 'You po-ah Tommee', Kipling returns to the theme:

Two years ago the sister of gunner-guard De Souza, East India Railway, had, at a dance given by the sergeants to the Allahabad Railway Volunteers, informed Copper that she could not think of waltzing with 'a po-ah Tommee'. Private

¹ I am not quite sure what is intended by this reference to the Sussex squire, which is repeated a little later, but I think it must refer to the current accusation against the Transvaalers: that they were establishing themselves as a Master Race, not only in relation to the natives but also to the Uitlanders. The renegade's manner would then be an attempt to translate the arrogance proper to a Master Race into a familiar English pattern. Cf. Copper's remark towards the end of the story: 'Why, I caught 'im in the shameful act of tryin' to start a aristocracy on a gun an' a waggon an' a *shambuck*! Yes; that's what it was: a bloomin' aristocracy.'

Copper wondered why that memory should have returned at this hour. (Both the name De Souza and the reference to the Indian railway service are of course meant to suggest Eurasians, from which the Indian railway personnel was largely recruited.)

The half-caste motif is resumed later on, when the renegade speaks of his hatred for England:

The voice quavered and ran high. Once more, for no conceivable reason, Private Copper found his inward eye turned on Umballa cantonments of a dry dusty afternoon, when the saddle-coloured son of a local hotel-keeper came to the barracks to complain of a theft of fowls. He saw the dark face, the plover's-egg-tinted eyeballs, and the thin excited hands. Above all, he remembered the passionate, queerly-strung words.

The reader is thus led to conclude that the renegade is a half-caste. But this turns out not to be the case after all: when Copper knocks him out, the first thing he does is to examine his finger nails, but the opal colouring which is supposed to mark the Eurasian is not there. 'No! Not a sign of it there,' he said. 'Is nails are as clean as mine—but he talks just like 'em though.' When he comes to, Copper tells him to say 'pore Tommy' again half a dozen times, and comments on his accent: '*That's* what's been puzzling me since I 'ad the pleasure o' meetin' you. You ain't 'alf-caste, but you talk *chee-chee*—pukka Bazar chee-chee.'

The Eurasian theme is thus interpolated into the story five times. What is one to make of this? Why does Kipling take so much trouble, and use so much space, first to suggest that the renegade is a half-caste, and afterwards to explain that he is not? The theme is far too insistent to be a mere digression, and no one familiar with Kipling's short

story technique, whose principal characteristic is an extreme verbal economy, could believe that it was. It is entirely foreign to his practice to introduce something into a story that does not serve a purpose, and in this case the theme appears, at the first glance, to be not merely a digression, but to have nothing whatever to do with the ostensible subject of the tale. It *must* mean something, and it must be explicable, if one could only find the clue, for this is obviously not one of the stories that are *meant* to be enigmatic, like for example, *Mrs Bathurst*. And as long as we cannot explain what purpose the Eurasian theme is intended to serve, we may very likely miss the whole point.

I believe that, so far from the Eurasian theme being irrelevant, the meaning of the whole story can be shown to hinge on it, and that, once it is grasped, it makes sense of an otherwise rather pointless tale. I also believe that at the time it was written the clue to its meaning was accessible to most readers. For readers of today the clue is much more difficult to discover, because in order to do so one must go back to the general atmosphere and the forgotten catchwords of the Transvaal crisis.

It may not be amiss to recall the fact that the ostensible cause of the Boer War was the treatment of the Uitlanders (the foreigners who had settled in Johannesburg on the Rand goldfields) by the Transvaal. The Uitlanders had a long list of grievances, but the British diplomatic offensive, inspired by Lord Milner, the High Commissioner for South Africa, concentrated almost wholly on one of them: their lack of political rights, which was due to the long residence qualification for naturalization and the franchise. Pressure was put on the Government of the Republic to reduce the residence qualification, on the

tacit assumption that the Uitlanders constituted a majority of the population, and that to give them the franchise would therefore be tantamount to making them the dominant factor in Transvaal politics—an assumption that was later on to be completely stultified by events.

The political powerlessness of the Uitlanders was commonly described as not only an economic and social handicap, but also as morally degrading. This was the line taken up by Milner's famous despatch to Chamberlain of May 4th, 1899. It contained the following passage:

The spectacle of thousands of British subjects kept permanently in the position of helots, constantly chafing under undoubted grievances, and calling vainly to Her Majesty's Government for redress, does steadily undermine the influence and reputation of Great Britain and the respect for the British Government within the Queen's dominions (*The Milner Papers*, vol. I, p. 353).

Milner's Helot Despatch, as it was usually called, was published in the press and caused a considerable sensation because its very strong language made it clear that matters were heading for a show-down; it was praised in some quarters for its outspokenness, and criticized for its somewhat demagogic tone in others. According to Garvin (*Life of Joseph Chamberlain*, vol. III, p. 417) it was 'the talk of the nation'.¹ The expression 'helots' was seized upon by the public, as is so often the case with phrases that seem to crystallize a political issue, and the word continued to

¹ It is given much prominence in all the contemporary books about the Transvaal crisis. For further evidence of the popular attention it attracted cf. e.g. *The Milner Papers*, vol. I, p. 355, and E. T. Cook's *Rights and Wrongs of the Transvaal War*, p. 123.

echo through the debate for a considerable time afterwards. (A frequent variant was the Biblical 'hewers of wood and drawers of water'.)

As was to be expected, Kipling accepted the British case in the Anglo-Transvaal dispute *in toto*. This appears from all the stories and newspaper articles that he wrote at the time, and some of the poems as well. Thus *The Old Issue*, written just before the outbreak of the war, is a poetical version of the official British view of the Uitlander grievances. It describes their struggle against the Kruger regime as a continuation of the same fight against tyranny and autocratic rule that runs through English history; it takes up Milner's 'helot' idea, and emphasizes the degrading effect of their position, which is pointedly described as sapping their manhood:

We shall drink dishonour, we shall eat abuse
For the Land we look to—for the tongue we use.

We shall take our station, dirt beneath his feet,
While his hired captains jeer us in the street.¹

.
Time himself is witness, till the battle joins,
Deeper strikes the rottenness in the people's loins (my italics).

What looks like an echo of the 'helot' despatch is also found at the beginning of *A Sahibs' War*, where Umr Singh speaks of the sahibs of Johannesburg as 'lying in bondage to the Boer-log', and 'lying without weapons under the heel of the Boer-log'. Further, that this has caused certain people in India to believe that the time has come to rise against the British Raj. He also reports his

¹ This is a reference to the *Zarps*, the Transvaal police, who were accused of using brutal methods against the Uitlanders.

beloved master, Kurban Sahib, as saying that 'we shall fight for all Hind in that country round Yunasbagh (Johannesburg)'. (Compare the last sentence quoted above from the Milner despatch: 'does steadily undermine the influence and reputation of Great Britain and the respect for the British Government *within the Queen's dominions*' (my italics).)

I believe that the story of the sufferings of the renegade's family and the Eurasian motif belong together, and that together they are meant—to put it a little crudely—as a defence of the British policy of insisting on political rights for the Uitlanders. The renegade's father, it will be remembered, spent eight¹ years in the Transvaal without having citizen rights, during which life was made hell for him and his family and he lost 'everything down to his self-respect'. During those eight years he was thus in the

¹ One wonders if the figure (8 years) is quite fortuitous: if the renegade's father settled in the Republic about 1879–80 (as must have been the case if he did so on the strength of Wolseley's promise, see above), and applied for naturalization 8 years later, he would come under the Transvaal Naturalization Law of 1883, which laid down a 5 years' residence qualification. He would thus have spent 13–14 years there before becoming a full Burgher. The corresponding figure for the Uitlanders in the 90's (when the residence qualification had been increased) can be computed in different ways, but the figure usually given during the Transvaal crisis was 14 years. One may think that all this implies an improbable familiarity with historical technicalities on Kipling's part, but the steps by which the Republic had made naturalization increasingly difficult were commonplaces of contemporary propaganda, and the figures were easily available. It might also be objected that this is to overestimate the amount of meaning that Kipling would pack into what is apparently an unimportant phrase, but students of his stories will know that it is safest to think him capable of anything in that respect. However that may be, I offer the above as at least a possibility.

same position as the Uitlanders were asserted to be by apologists of the British intervention.

And where, then, do the renegade's Eurasian features and chi-chi accent and manners come in? They are, I believe, a piece of daring symbolization. What Kipling intends to suggest is that if the Uitlanders continue to be treated as helots, as the renegade and his father were, then they will acquire the characteristics of helots: they will literally become an inferior race (compare above: 'deeper strikes the rottenness in the people's loins', with its Biblical suggestion of begetting and descent). And as a symbol of this, Kipling chose what was then regarded as an inferior race, with which he was familiar from his stay in India, and which he had often written about—sometimes with sympathy for their unfortunate lot as in *Kidnapped*, but nearly always with the assumption that they are in fact 'a lesser breed' (compare for example *His Chance in Life*)—no doubt the most shocking symbol of degradation that, as a former Anglo-Indian, he could think of.

The device of making the renegade actually *look* like a Eurasian is part of this symbolism, and may not have been intended by Kipling as a piece of realistic description. It is, of course, contrary to what is nowadays known about heredity, but it was not until about 1900 that Mendel's discoveries were made generally accessible and began to be followed up by other biologists. As late as the turn of the century, the whole concept of race was as unscientific as it still is in popular and demagogic ideologies, and there was as yet nothing demonstrably absurd in asserting that a person's external characteristics could be changed by his environment and his way of life. In fact several highly respectable nineteenth-century thinkers could be cited in support of ideas of this kind.

If the above interpretation of the Eurasian motif is correct, the apparent digressions of the story turn out to contain its moral, and *The Comprehension of Private Copper* proves to be a kind of parable on the chief issue of the Anglo-Transvaal conflict.

There remains one minor problem: that of the title of the story. It must be meant to indicate that Private Copper, in spite of his lack of education and his dropped h's, possesses some peculiar insight. It might simply be that, in the above-mentioned scene in the British camp, he sees through the demagogic phrases of the pro-Boer paper, were it not that *all* the soldiers do that, and that he is not described as playing a very prominent role in the scene in question. It seems much more likely that the proof of his insight is that he sees the similarity between the renegade and the Eurasians he has observed when he was in Umballa, and thus intuitively grasps what seemed to Kipling the most momentous implications of the Uitlander problem.

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